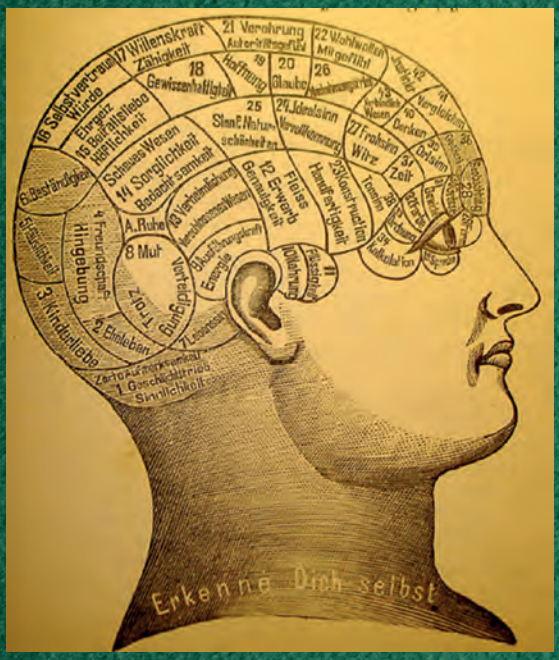
BIOGRAPHY STUDIES

Fear of Theory

Towards a New Theoretical Justification of Biography



Edited by Hans Renders and David Veltman

BRILL

Fear of Theory

Biography Studies

VOLUME 3

Fear of Theory

Towards a New Theoretical Justification of Biography

Edited by

Hans Renders
David Veltman

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: 'Darstellung der Charakteranlagen und Fähigkeiten', illustration from F.E. Bilz, *Das Neue Naturheilverfahren* (Leipsic: F.E. Bilz, s.n. (c. 1900) 96th ed., p. 1173).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Renders, Hans, editor. | Veltman, David, editor.
Title: Fear of theory : towards a new theoretical justification of biography / edited by Hans Renders, David Veltman.
Other titles: Towards a new theoretical justification of biography
Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2022] | Series: Biography studies, 2468-2497 ; 3 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021041799 | ISBN 9789004498549 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004498891 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Biography as a literary form. | Biography–Research–Methodology.
Classification: LCC CT22 .F43 2022 | DDC 808/.06692–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021041799

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2468-2497
ISBN 978-90-04-49854-9 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-49889-1 (e-book)

Contents

Notes on Contributors vii

Foreword
Scaffolding a House: Biography and the Role of Chance in a Life 1
Guðni Thorlacius Jóhannesson

PART 1
Reflections on Theory and Biography

The Deep-Rooted Fear of Theory among Biographers 15
Hans Renders

The Missing Key: Theorizing Modern Historical Biography 25
Nigel Hamilton

'Have They Caught the Cambridge Structuralist Yet?' Biography Writing and the Fear of Theory 40
Jeffrey Tyssens

Biography and Emotional Practice 55
Kerstin Maria Pahl

The Great Individual in History: Historicising Historian's Biographical Practice 72
Melanie Nolan

The Backside of the Biography: Microhistory as a Research Tool 89
Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon

PART 2
Biographers at Work

Beyond Verification and Falsification: Biography as Go-Between of Historical Truth 103
Eric Palmen

History That Addresses Biography: Ethics and the Vatican 114
Hans Renders

Brief Lives: A Microhistorical Approach 122
David T. Roth

'Une génération spontanée': Kandinsky Seen through the Eyes of Felix de Boeck (1898–1995) 140
David Veltman

Template for a Biography: What's the Sense of Theory 153
Hans Renders

Building a Better Biography 164
Carl Rollyson

Capturing the Subject: Virginia Woolf's Battle with Biographical Boundaries 176
Emma McEwin

PART 3
Dossier on Microhistory

The Representativeness of a Reputation: A 'Third Wave' in Microhistory 191
Hans Renders and David Veltman

The Devil Is in the Detail: What Is a 'Great Historical Question'? 195
Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon

Arguments for Microhistory 2.0 211
István M. Szijártó

Exceptions That Prove the Rule: Biography, Microhistory and Marginals 228
Hans Renders

Bibliography 239
Index 266

Notes on Contributors

Nigel Hamilton
senior fellow in the McCormack Graduate School, UMass Boston, has written more than twenty books, including *Biography: A Brief History*, and multi-volume biographies of Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery, President Bill Clinton, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as well as a best-selling biography of the early life of President John F. Kennedy. He has won the Whitbread Prize for Biography, the Templer Medal for Military History, and the New York Blue Ribbon Award for Best Documentary (Profile). His works have been translated into sixteen languages, including French, German, Dutch and Chinese. Nigel taught History and the History of Biography at Royal Holloway, University of London, from 1995 to 2000, and was made Professor of Biography at De Montfort University, where he pioneered undergraduate and postgraduate courses on the History of Biography and Approaches to Biography. He established the British Institute of Biography in collaboration with Royal Holloway, and won a Feasibility Award from the Arts Council of England and Wales to establish Britain's first center for biography. Moving to the United States in 2000, he helped found Biographers International Organization (BIO) and was elected its first President. His own specialty is military and presidential history and biography; his *The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941–1942* (Houghton Mifflin, 2014) was nominated for the National Book Award 2014. His three volume biography of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *FDR at War*, (2014–2019), was nominated for the National Book Award 2014. With Hans Renders he published in 2019 *The ABC of Modern Biography*, the Persian translation in 2021 appeared at RITM in Iran.

Guðni Thorlacius Jóhannesson
is President of Iceland. He was a Professor of History at the University of Iceland before becoming president in 2016. His most recent books are *Gunnar Thoroddsen. Ævisaga* (Reykjavík: JPV, 2010), *The History of Iceland* (*The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations*) (Santa Barbara (CA): Greenwood, 2013), and *Fyrstu forsetarnir* (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2016).

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon
is Professor of Cultural History, Department of History and Philosophy at the University of Iceland and senior researcher at the National Museum of Iceland. He is chair of the Center for Microhistorical Research (www.microhistory.org) at the University of Iceland. He is the founder and one of three edit-

ors of the book series 'Sýnisbók íslenskrar alþýðumenningar' (The Anthology of Icelandic Popular Culture) on egodocuments and everyday life history. He has written *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (with István M. Szijártó; 2013) and numerous other books and articles published in Iceland and abroad.

Emma McEwin
has a BA and Honours degree in English literature and a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the University of Adelaide. She is the author of *An Antarctic Affair* (East Street Publications, 2008) and *The Many Lives of Douglas Mawson* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018). 'Nancy Atkinson, bacteriologist, winemaker and writer' was published in Issue no.1 of *The Australian Journal of Biography and History* in December 2018.

Melanie Nolan
is Professor of History, Director of the National Centre of Biography and General Editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* in the School of History at the Australian National University (ANU). Her work includes Breadwinning (2000) a history of women and the state, and Kin (2005), a collective biography of a working-class family which won the 2006 ARANZ Ian Wards Prize and was short-listed for the 2007 Ernest Scott Prize. Her edited publications include *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist, Perspectives* (1994) and, most recently, as general editor, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 18 (2012) with vol. 19 forthcoming. She chairs the Editorial Committee of the ANU Press series in biography, *ANU Lives Series in Biography*, and is on the Editorial Board of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History*. She is currently working on a manuscript about historians' biographical practices which is under contract with Routledge.

Kerstin Maria Pahl
is an art historian and literary scholar. She currently works as a post-doctoral research fellow at the Centre for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, where she investigates the poetics and politics of insensibility in nineteenth-century Britain and the British Empire. She studied art history, classical archaeology, and German literature in Frankfurt, Berlin, and Cambridge and worked for the Cultural Foundation of the German Länder (Kulturstiftung der Länder). Her Ph.D. thesis (collaborative Ph.D. at HumboldtUniversity Berlin and King's College London) explored portraiture and life-writing in England between c. 1660–1790 and was funded by the German Academic Merit Foundation (Studienstiftung des Deutschen

Volkes). Her area of expertise and main research interests are British art, literature, and culture, portraiture and life-writing, history of emotions and non-emotions, and social history of art and literature.

Eric Palmen
studied history at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. Palmen wrote about urban history of Rotterdam and Dordrecht. He is the author of *Kaat Mossel. Helleveeg van Rotterdam* (2010) and *Dwaze liefde. Een familiegeschiedenis* (2011). He was involved in *Images of the Future*, a major project of Eye Film Museum with the National Archives and The Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision for the preservation and digital disclosure of the film heritage of the Netherlands. He developed a method for the research of copyrights and the application of the Orphan Works Directive that the European Community adopted in 2012. Palmen is chief editor of biografieportaal.nl, a review weblog concerning biography in the Netherlands. He writes about biography for several newspapers and magazines. Palmen is specialized in American Biography and interviewed authors like Kitty Kelly, Nigel Hamilton, John Aloysius Farrell, Carl Rollyson and Nick Weber. Currently he is working on a biography of Adrianus Johannes van Domburg, a Catholic film critic who put his mark on Dutch film culture with his ideas about Absolute Film.

Hans Renders
is Professor in History and Theory of Biography and is director of the Biography Institute, both at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He was a member of the founding committee of the Biographers International Organization (BIO). He has written biographies of the Dutch poet Jan Hanlo (1998) and the Dutch journalist and author Jan Campert (2004). He is editor of the Biographical Studies series and the editor-in-chief of a series of edited reprints of Dutch and foreign biographies. He has published studies on the theme of biography in various international journals, among them *Journal of Historical Biography*, *Le Temps des Médias*, and *Storia della Storiografia*. He is a member of the Editorial Board of *Quaerendo; A Journal Devoted to Manuscripts and Printed Books* and he is member of the Editorial Board of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History*. He edited (with Binne de Haan) the volume *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Brill, 2014) and (with Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma) the edited volume *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (Routledge, 2017). With Nigel Hamilton he published in 2018 *The ABC of Modern Biography*, the Persian translation in 2021 appeared at RITM in Iran. He is cofounder of the Société de Biographie / Biography Society. In collabor-

ation with Sjoerd van Faassen he works on the first biography of Theo van Doesburg.

Carl Rollyson

Professor Emeritus of Journalism, at Baruch College, CUNY, has published twelve biographies: *A Real American Character: The Life of Walter Brennan*, *A Private Life of Michael Foot*, *To Be A Woman: The Life of Jill Craigie*, *Amy Lowell Anew: A Biography*, *American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath*, *Hollywood Enigma: Dana Andrews*, *Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress*, *Lillian Hellman: Her Life and Legend*, *Beautiful Exile: The Life of Martha Gellhorn*, *Norman Mailer: The Last Romantic*, *Rebecca West: A Modern Sibyl*, *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*, and three studies of biography, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism? Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography, Biography: A User's Guide* and *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*. His reviews of biography appear in *Reading Biography, American Biography, Lives of the Novelists, Essays in Biography* in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The New Criterion* and other newspapers and periodicals. He has published four biographies for young adults on Pablo Picasso, Marie Curie, Emily Dickinson, and Thurgood Marshall. Recently he published *This Alarming Paradox: The Life of William Faulkner* and *The Last Days of Sylvia Plath*.

David Roth

researched as Ph.D. candidate the history of mental health care in the School of History at ANU after initial studies in chemistry and a long career in the IT industry. His thesis topic is 'Life, Death and Deliverance at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane 1877 to 1920'. He has particular interests in the mortality of the mentally ill and the history of medications. His publications include 'Chemical Restraints at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane before 1900' in *Health and History*. David has contributed to the Australian Civil Liberties Association's submission to the Commonwealth Royal Commission on Aged Care, writing on chemical restraints. He is a member of the Australian Historical Association and the Australian and New Zealand Society for the History of Medicine.

István M. Szijártó

is Professor of History at Eötvös University, Budapest. He has published several books about the social and cultural history of politics in 18th-century Hungary as well as the theoretical and methodological problems surrounding microhistory. His books in English are *What is microhistory? Theory and practice*. Routledge: London–New York, 2013 (co-author: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon)

and *Estates and constitution. The parliament in eighteenth-century Hungary*. Berghahn: New York–Oxford, 2020.

Jeffrey Tyssens
studied history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels, where he is currently professor of contemporary history. He was visiting professor or visiting research fellow in Paris, Mainz, Leiden and Berkeley. He has published extensively on the history of anticlericalism and secularism in western Europe, on funerary culture in the 19th century, on educational conflicts and the like. Tyssens is also a specialist in the history of freemasonry and other fraternal societies. He published several biographical articles with regard to American freemasons and leaders of American fraternalism at large. In 2016 he edited a special issue of the *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism* on biography and the history of fraternalism. He is member of the editorial boards of the Journal of Belgian History, the *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* and of the *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*.

David Veltman
worked as a Ph.D. student at the Biography Institute (University of Groningen) on a biography of the Flemish artist Felix de Boeck (1898–1995). In July 2021, he defended this biography as a PhD thesis before the University of Groningen. In his book questions were raised about De Boeck's relation to the *avant-garde* of his time. At an early age, De Boeck decided to earn his living as a farmer, in order to be independent from art galleries and museums. This decision was used as a framework to examine the way his artistic development was of influence to the development of his political views. Special attention was given to the interface between the artist's selfrepresentation and the shifting place of the artist in society. Together with Hans Renders, David wrote the yearly report for the Netherlands in the International Year in Review – issue of the magazine *Biography* in 2017, 2018 and 2020.

Foreword

Scaffolding a House: Biography and the Role of Chance in a Life

Guðni Thorlacius Jóhannesson

In the first contribution to this volume, Hans Renders uses an image I like, comparing theory in biography writing to scaffolding that is needed to build a house. I think we can take the comparison further. What building material was used, for instance? How are the foundations? Who wanted the house built? Who built it? What purpose is it meant to serve?

I come to these questions – I look at the construction – from two separate angles. First, I am a historian. As such, I worked in academia and tried my hand in the field of biographical writing. Second, I now serve as president of Iceland and, judging by the precedent of my predecessors, might one day be the subject of a biography. Moreover, I would not exclude writing a memoir about my official duties in this honourable position.

For a historian with an experience in the world of biography, moving from being a writer of subjects to the subject matter itself was and is an intriguing experience. Simon and Garfunkel's opening words in one of their most famous songs come to mind, 'I'd rather be a hammer than a nail.'

Future historians and biographers will probably conclude that my effect on general Icelandic history has been and will be modest. Maybe they will also argue that any such influence will not revolve mostly around how I conducted myself in office but rather how others might have acted, had they been elected.

Maybe, however, I will be able to influence how Icelanders evaluate and see their past. As a historian, I considered myself a storyteller with a purpose in society at large, not just within my profession. I wanted to construct thought-provoking and readable narratives that would reach a wide audience and influence the way people perceived both the past and the present. Frankly, I was not that interested in the theoretical aspects of such efforts. I just wanted the job done.

I well remember a debate on this facet of historical writing in 2005. This was shortly after I completed my doctoral thesis on fishing disputes in the North Atlantic in the mid-twentieth century, a traditional archive-based work of political and diplomatic history. I was head of the Association of Icelandic Historians and was beginning to try to make my voice heard among my colleagues. A few of us took part in an engaging exchange of ideas and opinions on our online discussion venue, including my good friend Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon,

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_002

aptly named 'the eminent connoisseur of microhistory' in Renders' words. Perhaps a bit too eager to incite responses, I stated that we should not complicate matters unnecessarily – that at the end of the day history is basically a very simple profession which entails recounting what happened in the past. Ranke could not have put it better. In a sense, I got what I deserved. This is unbelievably 'naïve', another friend immediately commented and more chimed in with similar comments, including the distinguished Anna Agnarsdóttir, an influential voice of reason (and, yes, we did manage to voice such criticisms and yet maintain our camaraderie).

Yet another friend in the field, Ólafur Rastrick, certainly gained the upper hand in our discussions with a wonderful, if somewhat ironic and partial, summary of my arguments:

> I would like to support the wise words of the head of our Association on this venue yesterday. How strange it is to allow people to make these primitive attempts to engage in scholarly debates about the premises of historical work. And to top it all, this is done at the historians' discussion venue! Yes, they just confuse us, these unfortunate captives of their own oscillation who never produce any real history. Of course, our role is to go and dig up the facts of the past and then disseminate them to the public. Why should we discuss the premises of what we are doing? Why should we discuss possible epistemic biases built into our profession? Why should we discuss the powers and influences which may affect what we search for, what we find, what we think we have found and how we disseminate our findings and so on and so forth?[1]

'Up with the shovels!' Rastrick concluded, referring to my call to 'dig up' sources about the past. Undeterred, I continued to defend my case, trying to explain that I was talking about the basic rationale – the need and desire to describe bygone events and developments, to produce history for interested readers. However, in online debates, as in politics, explanation usually comes too late.[2] I think I was still on the losing side when I continued writing that of course we should ponder all kinds of premises and biases – consider our theoretical framework (or scaffolding, in line with the comparison used above).

---

1 I kept the exchanges and provided a fair summary, I believe. See Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, 'Umræða um ekkert? Einföld og flókin skoðanaskipti sagnfræðinga um aðferð og afurð, sögur og sagnfræði, skor, skóga og tré', *Kistan* 5 April 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20070103041920/http://www.kistan.is/efni.asp?n=3574&f=15&u=94.

2 For this perspective on the political arena, see Michael Ignatieff, *Fire and Ashes. Success and Failure in Politics* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015), p. 35–37.

But I also stuck to my guns: 'It is not enough to wonder what kind of grip we should have on the shovel; we also need to wield it. For if not, why are we holding on to it?'

So it went on, with exchanges back and forth. Once more I tried to summarize my view on visible output versus the underlying theory and came up with a phrase that I was quite proud of, although nobody else seems to have found it worth remembering: 'Method is nothing without product.'[3]

Then it was time to put words into action – wield the shovel, build the house. Later in 2005, I published my first book on history and in the following year two others followed in quick succession. The first of the three was about one of Iceland's presidents, based mostly on his diaries. The second one was a slim volume on the Cod Wars, the Anglo-Icelandic fishing conflicts in the latter half of the twentieth century. The third one revealed threat perceptions, phone-tapping and other kinds of secret surveillance by the Icelandic state during the Cold War.

All of them were written for the general public, yet with adherence to general academic standards. I agree with those colleagues who complain that 'popular history', admittedly a vague and imprecise term, can be lacking in precision, care and accuracy, and sometimes overly nationalistic, one-dimensional and simplistic.[4] As for myself, I felt that my theoretical or epistemic framework was simple: To write in an engaging manner, to be critical but balanced and not to bow to any outside pressure. And all these works were heavily based on new sources. In other words, I used the shovel and dug up documents in the archives.

On that front, I am also convinced of the vital importance of sources as the basis of historical research. I would not go as far as the once well-known conservative historian G.R. Elton who, in Alun Munslow's words, was 'suspicious that theory was probably just an excuse for idleness in the archive'.[5] But I would like to point to the warning voice of Ruth Paley of the British Records Association, in a notification on H-Net in early 2020 about a forum on 'Archives and records in a post-truth world': 'In the present climate of cynicism and disbelief about information and indeed in institutions, lies a serious danger failure that records are no longer recognized as a vital part of the process of evidence needed to challenge and understand our society.'[6]

---

3 Jóhannesson, 'Umræða um ekkert?'

4 For such criticism in Iceland, see e.g. Ólafur Rastrick and Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (eds.), *Menningararfur á Íslandi. Greining og gagnrýni* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2015), p. 167.

5 Alun Munslow, *Narrative and History* (Basingstoke [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 3.

6 Ruth Paley, 'Archives and records in a post-truth world', https://networks.h-net.org/node/16749/discussions/5600011/archives-and-records-post-truth-world, 2 January, 2020.

My books on history were not biographies, admittedly, but surely these considerations apply to life-writing as well. Before I embarked on my doctoral studies, I had written a semi-biographical work, the history of deCode Genetics and its larger-than-life founder and CEO, Kári Stefánsson. It was written in haste, it was unauthorised, and it was an unforgettable experience. Indirectly, it also prepared me for an assignment that came to fruition in 2010. In that year, I finished a massive biography (at least in weight and length) of Gunnar Thoroddsen (1910–1983). He was a politician whose manifold career in public life lasted over half-a-century, including a stint as mayor of Reykjavík, decades in parliament, ministerial posts, a failed run for president, and ultimately the premiership, a post he had long sought.

The work was commissioned. Thoroddsen's family wanted to fulfil his wish that a book be written about his legacy and the publisher betted on a book that should sell well, provided it was not written in a dry, 'academic' style. Any discussion on the theoretical aspects of biography must entail these factors. In this particular case, the protagonist's relatives assured me that I would have full freedom to write as I saw fit, not the least about his long-running problem with alcohol, a battle he ultimately won. I fully subscribe to the view that, in biographies, honesty is key. In this particular case, I firmly believe that readers grew more sympathetic towards the subject because of his human faults, not in spite of them.[7] As one writer put it, having written about Manning Clark, one of Australia's most prolific and controversial historians, 'Biography's purpose is to lay things out … and to do so in a way which is always fair and sympathetic to the person as can be possible.'[8] And if it is not, truth still needs to be told, especially in writings about people of power and influence. In *Working*, Robert Caro's primer on his approach towards biography, this master of Lyndon B. Johnson's life explains that in his multi-volume work he wrote little on 'the many women with whom Lyndon Johnson had had sex … because none of them seemed to have any significance to him personally or to have any connection with his political or governmental activities.' I, however, support the criticism that Caro, who writes unhesitatingly about Johnson's other character faults should not have overlooked 'his virulent misogyny'. Joshua Kendall, the author of those words, argued further that this 'points to a long-standing blind spot not just in presidential biography but in the culture at large'.[9]

7 For a similar conclusion, see Stefán Pálsson, 'Tár, bros og töfraskór', in: *TMM* 3(2011), p. 136–140.

8 Doug Munro, review of Mark McKenna's *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/1253.

9 Joshua Kendall, 'Robert Caro's Blind Spot', *Slate* 22 April, 2019, https://slate.com/culture/2019/04/lyndon-johnson-robert-caro-affairs-misogyny.html.

That assertion might be debated. Many biographies of presidents and other public persons are quite explicit about private affairs, sexual misdemeanours and other aspects that might generate an interest in society. I will not discuss here whether that fact is deplorable or not, but we need to keep in mind that, in general, publishers want a 'sellable' product. They need profits. They do not operate in the academic world where other rules apply. During his years in the world of publishing, William Rees-Mogg learned 'that books on Marilyn Monroe always made a profit'.[10]

However, we historians and biographers are not only at the publishers' mercy. They usually sense that the public may like provocative or challenging biographies. In my case, the publisher certainly agreed that we should stray away from the earlier tradition in political biographies or autobiographies in Iceland where criticism was muted and praise was the norm, 'hagiographic tales' as one of my colleagues rightly put it.[11]

The escape from hagiography must not lead to sensationalism, however. The heading of the first media 'teaser' for my work on Thoroddsen is a case in point: 'Confided his faults to his diary'.[12] My publisher, with whom I enjoyed working, knew what would draw wide attention and it was not first and foremost my long chapters on a politician's beliefs or manoeuvres behind the scenes, even though they were quite exciting at times (in my opinion, at least). Still, in this particular biography, it was obvious that the bulk of the work should focus on the protagonist's public life, his success and failures in the political arena.

Thoroddsen's personal diary and notes provided the mainstay of the book, with detailed descriptions of his hopes, setbacks, and feelings. Here, I therefore return to the importance of sources. No matter how much we emphasize the need for a sound theoretical framework – the scaffolding if you like – there can be no construction without material. Thoroddsen's drinking at some stages in his life was common knowledge but it would have been impossible to analyse its effect on his whole life without the documents I found in the basement of his widow's apartment.

Finally, my experience from this fascinating diversion to life-writing convinced me yet further of the importance of agency and individuals in wider historical developments. My hero's life was certainly full of chances that led

10 William Rees-Mogg, *Memoirs* (London: HarperPress, 2011), p. 282.

11 Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, 'Biskupasögur hinar nýju: um ævisögur fjögurra stjórnmálamanna', in: *Saga* (1993)31, p. 167–190.

12 'Trúði dagbókinni fyrir brestum sínum', in: *Fréttablaðið* 15 Sept. 2010.

him from one phase to another and those haphazard changes influenced political developments in the country.

I venture to suggest that all historians, in particular those in the fields of social and economic history, should try their hand at biographical writings. Conversely, biographers would benefit from trying their hand at composing grand narratives, overviews of wide developments in space and time – the type of history which Sigurður Gylfi, that apt expert of microhistory, certainly dislikes! Too much emphasis on individuals, at the expense of society and deep currents, impinges our view. If I return again to Renders' comparison, it is akin to seeing the bricks behind the scaffolding but not the building itself. A better known expression would be the one about not seeing the wood for the trees.

When I was elected President of Iceland in 2016, I had a number of works in the pipelines, including a biography, a book on the country's presidents that was near completion, and my magnum opus, the fruits of my doctoral research and years in the archives, a multivolume work on the Cod Wars. Obviously, this transition altered all these plans. To be sure, I managed to publish the overview on Icelandic presidents. Still, I changed the tone somewhat and omitted the chapter on my immediate predecessor, more 'political' and more controversial than the last two persons who were in office before him.

In these pandemic days, I have sometimes been able to seek solace by continuing to work on my books on long gone fishing disputes. 'In many ways I cannot stand the present,' a mediaevalist colleague once remarked and I am fond of this remark by Winston Churchill that I discovered in Antonia Fraser's memoirs: 'It has been a comfort to me in these anxious days to put a thousand years between my thoughts and the twentieth century.'[13]

Where you stand depends on where you sit, it has been said. Historians and other academics hold a duty to society and the ethics of their profession, not to the interests of the state and statespersons in power. They need to be critical, not compliant. Conversely, it is almost written in a president's job description to promote unity and optimism.

For a historian turned president, this can be problematic. An academic who entered the political arena in another country was once told that 'if he wanted to be right rather than be prime minister, he should have stayed in university'.[14]

---

13 Antonia Fraser, *My History. A Memoir of Growing Up* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2015), p. 254. Ragnhildur Hólmgeirsdóttir, 'Hvað eru sögulegir tímar?' in: *Saga* 58(2020)2 p. 24.

14 Michael Bliss, *Right Honourable Men. The Descent of Canadian Politics from Macdonald to Mulroney* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994). The comment refers to Pierre Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, 1968–1979 and 1980–1984.

During my presidential campaign, some opponents condemned my revisionist tendencies, in particular a critical, or what I would like to call nuanced, approach to the fishing disputes with Britain. Those conflicts are central in the nation's collective memory of recent history, even comparable in that sense to Britain's 'Finest hour' during the Second World War. According to these critics, I had degraded the heroics of those who fought gallantly for Iceland's interests and how could someone with that track record become head of state, a unifying figure? Again, I can point to similar instances abroad, where academics or persons of letters were accused of disloyalty to the nation. Not that I would compare my writings to his, but after Mario Vargas Llosa lost the run for the presidency in Peru, he complained how the 'hate office' searched in his bibliography in order to find statements and quotations he had cited in articles and interviews attacking nationalism as one of the 'human aberrations that has caused the most bloodshed in history'.[15] In Canada, Michael Ignatieff, the successful academic turned failed politician, described in retrospect how unscrupulous opponents twisted his earlier remarks and opinions: 'This aspect of politics – tendentious political misreading of something you said years before – was new to me.'[16]

Taking part in the debate about history and alleged treachery in my writings, I provided a possible solution, a vision of patriotism without chauvinism. Fortunately, this outlook seemed to appeal to many of those who were interested in this aspect of my candidacy:

> If elected, I don't want to undergo a complete transformation. ... and hope that nobody googles me. But I would want the nation to understand that we can present the past in all its variety without being accused of disparaging the achievements of those who were in the forefront.[17]

In office, I have therefore aimed to highlight the dangerous but tempting desire of people in positions of power to use the past for their own present purposes. Likewise, I have continued to emphasize the distinction that needs to be made between healthy patriotism on the one hand, an inclusive and positive respect for our society, heritage, and history, and on the other hand the evils of a big-

15 Mario Vargas Llosa, *A Fish in the Water. A Memoir*. Transl. by Helen Lane (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 422.

16 Ignatieff, *Fire and Ashes*, p. 36.

17 Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, 'Þjóðin og fræðin. Nokkur orð um tilvistarvanda sagnfræðings sem varð forseti', https://www.forseti.is/media/1838/2017_03_10_hugvisindathing.pdf.

oted adulation of the nation and the instillation of automatic fear or suspicion towards the outside world.[18]

My personal change in profession has reinforced these beliefs. Overall, historians agree on the need to warn against the abuses of history by statespersons or aggressive extremists. They can easily point to the dangers of excessive nationalism and the temptation by national leaders to portray foreigners as evil enemies of the people. I wonder, however, if historians and other academics have at the same time downplayed, ignored or even belittled people's need for a common purpose, a common understanding of where we came from.

It could perhaps be beneficial for historians, especially those in the privileged position of tenure and academic security, to try to look at the world from other places than that safe confine. Still, it goes without saying that we do not want a return to the historical tradition of old, and I refer here to one of my favourite works on historiography, G.P. Gooch's encyclopaedic volume on history and historians in the nineteenth century.[19]

The sea change in my life in 2016 also enhanced my view on the importance of chance in individuals' existence. A totally unpredictable and unforeseen sequence of events led to my candidacy. During my tenure, I have also seen first-hand how coincidences can impact political developments. This experience will certainly influence my research and writing in the field of biography, if I ever return to that pleasurable pursuit. Similarly, my appreciation of written sources has been reinforced. Time and again, I have seen how information has been preserved in reports, emails and my own diary that would otherwise have vanished. During these days of Covid-19, I also make note of my colleague's new and excellent work on the 1918 influenza pandemic in Iceland. 'What if the nurses … had kept a diary and recorded there their thoughts', Gunnar Þór Bjarnason wrote: 'Or if they had sat down once the catastrophe was over and described their experience. If only those heroes had known how much they would have pleased one historian a century later!'[20]

Contrarywise, I also realize better than before how documents will always need to be evaluated, seen in a context and not taken automatically at face value. I am not saying that this applies to records emanating from my office

18 E.g. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, 'Icelanders or Norwegians? Leifur, Snorri, and national identity then and now', https://www.forseti.is/media/2006/2017_03_23-nationalism_eng.pdf, and 'Defending Asgard, independence and human rights. The use of history in current affairs', https://www.forseti.is/media/5893/2020_03_04_polland_un_warsaw.pdf.

19 G.P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London/New York, Longmans, Green, and co., 1913).

20 Gunnar Þór Bjarnason, *Spænska veikin* (Reykjavík: Forlagið, 2000), p. 156.

but I refer to Jonathan Lynn's and Anthony Jay's wonderful (and fictional) reminder in the sitcom *Yes, Minister* that the minister's notes might reflect:

a) What happened.
b) What he believed happened.
c) What he would like to have happened.
d) What he wanted others to believe happened.
e) What he wanted others to believe that he believed happened.[21]

Furthermore, my awareness of the limitations of written sources has been reinforced. I have looked up dates and wondered why nothing was written by me or others about a vital part of a sequence of events. I have also sensed how the documents do not capture the feel of the day, the emotions or the confusion. Furthermore, so much (unofficial) communication now takes place over the phone, by phone messages or through social media. Thus, my awareness of the limitations of sources in historical and biographical writing has been strengthened.

Finally, I have come to realize that it is one thing to espouse frankness in writings and access to sources when you're the author, quite another if you're the subject. The future will reveal whether I write my own memoirs and how I will react to possible interest from others to write about my tenure as president or my whole life. It is easy to recount how documents about heads of state and political leaders have been off limits to biographers or other researchers. In his monumental work on Emperor Hirohito, Herbert Bix described how diaries and family correspondence will likely remain inaccessible in perpetuity. The son of Richard Nixon's personal physician once vowed to never reveal certain aspects of the president's health and as one biographer complained: 'My argument that the public interest or the public's right to know whether the president was incapacitated and should have had his authority suspended under the Twenty-fifth Amendment did not convince him.'[22]

It is also easy to name cases of controlled access in order to shape history and legacies. In Canada, the executors of Premier William Mackenzie King's papers only offered sympathetic observers access to his sensitive diaries.[23] In a similar vein, we can find examples where access to documents has embar-

21 Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay, *The Complete Yes Minister* (BBC Books: London 1989), p. 9.
22 Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 6. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger* (London: Penguin, 2008, p. 546).
23 Christopher Dummitt, *Unbuttoned. A History of Mackenzie King's Secret Life* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), p. 196–197.

rassed state leaders. Recently, declassified conversations between Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan demonstrated how they freely used racist language out of earshot, assuming of course that their crudeness would not become public knowledge. Similarly, in the introduction to my work on President Kristján Eldjárn, I recounted how Henry Kissinger had to apologize when it was revealed how he had, in the presumed safety of the Oval Office, called Indira Gandhi a 'bitch' and all Indians 'bastards'. This I did in order to explain that the reputation of Eldjárn remained unharmed although I revealed the content of his diaries and the reflections he had taped himself. He never called anyone a bastard, let alone a bitch, and when I was elected president I recalled this point I had made about my predecessor, although I hasten to add that I had not been in the habit of using such derogatory descriptions.[24] If you have no skeletons in the closet, you should find it easy to be welcoming and open-minded. However, if you are reserved by nature, you may not want to answer questions about everything that might leap to the mind of a biographer, or give unlimited access to your diary and other written sources.

The argument has been made that when leaders are in office, they must not fret too much about the 'verdict of history'. In conversation with historian Benny Morris, Shimon Peres argued that a 'leader who worries about how he will go down in history will not be a great leader'.[25] It is necessary to look in the press how our reputation is valued, but it is quite something else to become too obsessed with shaping our own history. In the US, where presidential biography is a particular genre, statesmen have been conscious of how they will be portrayed after their death. Some presidents already wanted to defend their legacy as soon they took power and then throughout their whole tenure. 'Man's desire to be remembered is colossal,' Franklin D. Roosevelt is to have remarked when he saw pyramids in Egypt in 1943.[26]

All these considerations make up for a theoretical basis of biography. Every case is unique, however. Every life contains its own peculiarities, twists and

24 Tim Naftali, 'Ronald Reagan's Long-Hidden Racist Conversation With Richard Nixon', *The Atlantic* 30 July 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/ronald-reagans-racist-conversation-richard-nixon/595102. 'Kissinger regrets 1971 remarks on India', in: *The New York Times*, 2 July 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/02/world/asia/kissinger-regrets-1971-remarks-on-india.html. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, *Völundarhús valdsins. Stjórnarmyndanir, stjórnarslit og staða forseta Íslands í embættistíð Kristjáns Eldjárns, 1968–80* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2005), p. 205.

25 Benny Morris, 'Making History', *Tablet Magazine* [online], July 26, 2010.

26 See Sara Polak, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt as an Architect of Public History', in: Jelte Olthof and Maarten Zwiers (eds.), *Profiles in Power. Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), p. 83.

turns. As for myself, I can certainly say that moving from writing national history towards becoming part of it has changed my outlook on the practice of writing about the past. Most significantly, it has increased my belief in the importance of agency, contingency and chance in human affairs. Also, I believe that I am even more aware of the limitations of our available sources. Finally, writing this article has reminded me how much I enjoy historical research. That feeling should perhaps be the main prerequisite for anyone wanting to enter the world of history and biography.

PART 1

Reflections on Theory and Biography

∴

The Deep-Rooted Fear of Theory among Biographers

Hans Renders

Theory in relation to biography is a hot issue, to which you would rather not burn your fingers. Instead, biographers increasingly prefer to be novelists, although that love is not reciprocal. They sometimes confuse the difference between narrative non-fiction and invented non-narrative. This *volume* wants to show the value of theory for the biographer. That is not a plea to write unreadable academically formulated biographies – on the contrary! – but a double call to raise awareness among biographers. Everything to make it clear to the reader of this volume that a theoretic framework, like an invisible scaffold, gives the biography a stronger presence. Anyone who is willing to read a full-length book about a person will surely want to know how the author of that story proceeded, what his starting points and intentions are. A theoretical embedding does not have to stand in the way of a beautifully written biography.

We asked several biographers and researchers to reconstruct the theory behind their books. How does the backside of a biography look like, the side one cannot see? How does the invisible hand look like? Some biographies are exclusively inventorying, others are based on a theoretical notion, a research method, for example by comparing human lives to find out how respresentative a person is, by using the microhistorical method or by using psychology? Which disciplines do we use?

We are proud to present the result of this call here. Scholars from Australia, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands and the United States show in their contributions how the genre (biography) can win by demonstrating in different ways that a biography needs a solid foundation.[1] So what does theory mean for the biographer?[2]

1 Nigel Hamilton and Hans Renders, *The ABC of Modern Biography* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2018) and Hans Renders and Nigel Hamilton, *Het ABC van de Biografie* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2018). I use a few passages in this contribution from the Dutch edition that are not in the English edition.

2 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, 'The Life Is Never Over: Biography as a Microhistorical Approach', *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 42–52; Hans Renders, 'Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything?: The Deadly Sins of Biographers', in: *Journal of His-*

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_003

Often you read in prefaces of biographies or in interviews with biographers that they consulted 'the theory' before writing their biography. From these remarks about 'consulting theory' appears the naive view that all literature on biography can be combined into a practical manual for writing a biography.

This misunderstanding is understandable, because the term 'theory' is often confused with the opposite, namely the 'practice', the instruction. *The* theory of biography, which takes the biographer by the hand and makes him write the ideal biography, is an utopia. Theories 'unify a range of apparently disparate, unconnected phenomena by postulating an underlying principle that these phenomena have put into common and that can explain their nature or behavior. Second, the common underlying principle, postulated by the theory – whether it takes the form of an entity, process, force, concept, or something else – is at least hidden from view,' according to Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey in their introduction of Ludwig Wittgenstein.[3] They almost gave a definition of what Wittgenstein understood as 'theory'. To put it simply: 'the kind of understanding that consists in seeing connections'. No theory can be definitively proven, according to Karl Popper, you can always keep searching for reliable observations and as long as they do not contradict a certain theory, agreement can be reached about the correctness of an assertion.

Nigel Hamilton in his contribution to this volume leaves no misunderstanding about the necessity of theory in his article 'The Missing Key: Theorizing Modern Historical Biography': 'Scholars of biography all agree: modern biography is still woefully under-theorized. Moreover most agree that – given its two thousand-year history and its continuing popularity in western cultures, as well as its central concern to discover, to share and to update the truth about the real lives of real individuals, past and present – this is deplorable.'

Theory problematizes in the confidence that a higher consciousness leads to better results, while instruction gives instant solutions such as a manual for a DIY kit from Ikea. How-to-do books for biographers are abundant, unfortunately theoretical awareness the less. Probably because theoretical awareness

---

torical Biography 1(2008)3, p. 98–123; Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, 'Introduction: The Challenges of Biography Studies', in: *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 1–8.

3 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.

that is useful to the biography is useful for almost all research. It is not specifically labeled as 'useful for biographers' and therefore an untrodden path for most of them.

Although there is no biographical theory, there are methods which the biographer can use to collect material and to put it in a context in order to make a certain proposition plausible. We can be short about these methods here: they are the same as those of a historian. With the understanding that there is no single theory for historians as well. Indeed, the field of interest of historians is unlimited. Kerstin Maria Pahl shows in her contribution 'Biography and emotional Practice' which implications the history of emotions can have to biographical research. She has two interrelated aims, one historical and one methodological. By mapping out the importance of feelings in the history of biographical theory, she subsequently enquires into approaches to emotions in biographical research. Jeffrey Tyssens shows in this volume how theoretical insights have lead to discussions within both national and scholarly traditions. With his classical essay *The Resistance to Theory* (1979), literary theorist and deconstructionist 'guru' Paul de Man referred to the resistance of 'the material' against theorizing. Academic fashion ('French radical chic'), self-promotion by dint of esoteric jargon, defending one's turf against the others, they all had a part in the 'theory wars', so much so that one could ask what was actually at stake.

There is, however, a common code: collecting material from a reasoned proposition, questioning it and eventually making a story of it. Carl Rollyson shows us how biographers can learn from previous biographers of the same person. In his case William Faulkner. What are the theoretical implications of an outline for a biography? 'Consequently, the biographer, like one of Faulkner's own characters, has to, at some points, speculate in order to complete the story of that character, William Faulkner. With Faulkner, one detects, surmises, infers, imagines, and ratiocinates.'

One of the theoretical approaches to historiography is microhistory. The important common feature of the new microhistory of Carlo Ginzburg and 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 that needs to be explained. This peculiar event or phenomenon is regarded as a sign of a larger, but hidden or unknown structure. A strange detail is made to represent a wider totality. Microhistory also serves to reexamine the big story on the basis of one person and possibly to put it in perspective, to reinterpret or even correct it. As showed in a wonderful contribution by David Veltman. He shows the principle of 'normal exception' by applying microhistory to the 1920s environment of the Belgian 'constructivist'

avant-garde artist Felix De Boeck. He argues that the avant-garde group where De Boeck belonged to can be seen as a normative group, which influenced the mentality of its members in a profound way.

Another example is the concept of pillarization (*verzuiling* in Dutch). In Dutch historiography the influence of pillarization is heavily overstated, without institutions at regional or local level being investigated. Approaching history at microlevel tells us that the macrohistory of pillarization should be revalued. In diaries and letters indications can be found that the typical pillarized writer aspired to escape from the pillar he or she originally belonged to. Writers of the Catholic or Protestant pillar, even authors who are known as their advocates, made continuous efforts to become part of the liberal pillar. We can consider the case of the prominent Catholic writer Paul Haimon, who was, thanks to his administrative and social positions, the undisputed patron of the arts in the Dutch province of Limburg. Biographical research and interpretation of his life leads to the conclusion that Haimon tried to enter the liberal pillar through the neutral publishing house Nijgh & Van Ditmar.

What new insights would emerge if Haimon would be investigated from the agency-perspective instead of the representativeness of his life? In other words: what results would be possible if Haimon was interpreted from the perspective of the Catholic pillar? And especially his ambition to change his environment is meaningful. Eric Palmen contributes in this volume a beautiful example of how to interpret pillarization in his research to the catholic movie critic Janus van Domburg.

'Social change' in history is always a powerful force for change in any sense whatsoever. Biographers therefore more often should act as a microhistorian and deliberately ask themselves where the Turning Points can be found. They should try to interpret facts of life as a deviating instead of 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 should be presented by invisible, institutionalized hands.

Integrating the microhistorical approach *within* biographies, by focusing on various or alternative decisive episodes in a life, could be the next step. This step could add a new dimension to the concept of the critical 'interpretative biography'. By presenting an unexpected key period in a life as a point of departure, as a Turning Point, one is able to interpret Grand Narratives in a different way. The interpretation of a person then specifically serves to improve the understanding of a history beyond this life. In this case biography does not function merely as an illustration of a well-known history, but as a multiplier of interpretations of historical events and structures. See for an example

the research plan, in this issue, which forms the basis for the biography of the artist, theorist and founder of the magazine *De Stijl* Theo van Doesburg.

But other applications of interpretation are also possible, where the self-awareness of the biographer and her biographee is concerned, as Emma McEwin demonstrates in her contribution on Virginia Woolf. 'There's no trifling with words – can't be done, not when they're to stand 'forever", wrote Virginia Woolf while in the throes of trying to 'dispatch' *Flush*, her biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Cocker Spaniel. As a novelist and biographer, as an essayist, diarist, and critic, she was constantly exploring and experimenting with what makes a literary work to resonate and endure. Her primary quest, in both fiction and biography, was to capture, in writing, the essence of human character, which she alternately referred to as personality, reality, 'the spirit we live by, life itself'.

But what are Turning Points? In the life of Adolf Hitler, his election as Reichs Kanzler in January 1933 was a Turning Point, or his decision to start a world war on the first of September 1939. For Archimedes it was the day in 212 BC when he took a bath and during a brainwave understood that the upward buoyant force exerted on a body immersed in a fluid is equal to the weight of the fluid the body displaces. For Marcel Proust the decisive day was the day he ate a madeleine and he got inspired to write *À la recherche du temps perdu*. It seems simple, nevertheless we have mentioned three different categories of Turning Points by now. The Turning Points of Hitler's public life are marked by historians, while very different decisive moments perhaps can be indicated in his personal life. His rejection at the art academy in Vienna, for example. Was this the source of his lifelong dislike of modern art? That is quite plausible, because when he sat for an entrance exam in 1907 the school of cubist painting emerged. The bathroom experience of Archimedes is personal, but in another sense it is completely not. A lot of human beings regularly take a bath, only for natural sciences this was a Turning Point.

'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,' Giovanni Levi stated.[4]

4 Giovanni Levi, 'The Uses of Biography', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, eds., *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 61–74.

1 Microhistory: A Debate without an End

In microhistory – the name indicates it – historians originally look at the smallest actors in history in relation to the big stories or the famous leaders. We do research in small villages, not *on* small villages, according to microhistorians like Levi. Microhistory is a method. Ginzburg's most famous work is a reconstruction of the worldview and the religious views of a sixteenth-century miller. The premise is that by zooming in to the smallest components of the historical course, it is possible to think critically about the sustainability of the larger stories. For the microhistorian, the most important key lies in the context: a relevant study must give an impression of a historical framework, and can show how individuals were formed or influenced by their environment.

At the same time, it must be said that the influence of that context can never be considered absolute. According to Levi, the possible choices of an individual are determined by their environment, but a person always has a certain freedom, or 'agency'. He therefore states that twists and turns in history not only originate from the larger structures, but can also be brought about by individual people. Micro and macro are therefore at odds with each other: none of the two has a clear preponderance, and it is up to the micro-historian to find out how the relations really are.

Biography was considered for a long period with great skepticism by the academic world. After the genre became extremely popular worldwide a quarter of a century ago, scholars became more interested in how a personal background can give an important twist to history telling. The time of structures seemed to be over. Something strange has happened in the meantime. It seems as if the great interest in a genre that has been made respectable by non-academics – the biography – is embraced by the academic world to stifle the genre. Like Aretha Franklin sang: 'Killing me softly'. Everywhere in the world you see university institutions that focus on Life Writing. Although the personal is the subject of study, the acquired knowledge is mainly used to identify sociological structures and patterns.

This volume is not only for believers. The eminent connoisseur of microhistory Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon is gradually starting to question the supposed relationship between a person and his context. 'I maintain that the ideology of general history, which is grounded primarily in the predetermined pattern of the grand narrative, has lost its way. For a long time I had hope that microhistory, as it developed in Italy and other countries, might provide an answer to this obligation which appears to be placed on historians' shoulders – to have their minds constantly on the structure of the society and larger entities. In its early days, microhistory certainly made a promising start in that direction;

and it has opened up a view of reality which was unexpected, and had not been explored before.'

What makes biography a kind of historiography? Biography and historiography are broad concepts. Just as publications by historians can take all sorts of forms, depending on the theme, period and of course the writing talent of the historian concerned, the scholarly biography also exists in many shapes and sizes. But the similarity between these variants of books that present themselves as biographies is the belief that research on an individual can be tested with the aid of the same standards as a study of the Second World War or American foreign policy between 1950 and 1965. An important criterion is the controllability of the sources. And always the question of the representativeness of the research results will have to be raised. Is a certain part of the foreign policy of Harry S. Truman or Dwight D. Eisenhower representative of the whole policy or do we encounter a more or less unique phenomenon? David Roth's contribution to this issue is a exciting example of biographical research, thanks to the microhistorical method. On the basis of medical data, he manages to position patients of a nineteenth- and early twentieth century asylum in their own social background, in Sydney. The term 'normal exception' clearly applies to the patients discussed in Roth's submission. These seemingly unusual and exceptional cases in the asylum reveal, upon further investigation, a hidden reality or routine practices that can be considered questionable according to the standards of that period.

In the seventies and eighties of the last century, microhistorians have called attention to the vicissitudes of subaltern people in historiography, to the individual that until then has not been represented by historians. And then it was not just people, such as criminals and other outcasts of society, but also marginal forms such as the signature of a painting, in order to reach wider conclusions about the world. Subsequently, several authors, such as the Finnish historian Matti Peltonen, have, as it were, brought the phenomenon of microhistory into a new phase by applying the representativeness question to the marginalities of society, the 'normal exceptions', instead of to familiar groups and persons. In this way it became possible to highlight the representativeness of groups of individuals that were previously not recognized as a community. Peltonen argues for zooming in on events and situations in such a way that the reduction in scale no longer only brings people into the picture as politicians or artists, but also as inhabitants of a village or as members of a family clan.

The famous book *Montailliou* by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie was for a long time presented as groundbreaking because, through a microhistory of a fourteenth-century village in the Pyrenees, the story of the late Middle Ages would be told, like the grain of sand that basically contains all the properties

of the whole beach. Microhistory would be representative of the big story. But you can also turn that around. Microhistory is not only about a small history (a village, a painting or a wanderer) in which a forgotten part of history is represented. Also it is not only about the 'exceptional normal' or the 'normal exception', but rather microhistory brings in the small story to put the great history story into perspective, and perhaps even to change it a little bit. The example of microhistory, as we now have to conclude, has turned out to be a dead end. It is about unique events that give a new meaning to the grand narrative. The umpteenth description of a life in the concentration camp can be poignant, but only adds something about the history of the Second World War if it is *not* exemplary, not another confirmation of what we already know.

To understand the whole, we have to understand the parts, but to understand these, 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,' according to the nineteenth-century German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey.[5] By means of biographical research into a person microhistorians investigate to what extent the current story on a particular culture is correct. The biographer is not the lawyer of that individual in this process, but the lawyer of history, a micro-lawyer, but a lawyer.

Journalism honors a number of principles that are also important for microhistorians and biographers alike. One of them is that the representation question should always be asked. In valuable journalism, the report will always search for a context that makes it clear to the reader whether the unicity or representativeness is confirmed in a news story. Media theories about hypes are a good example of this. During a hype about nightlife violence, every problem in the nightlife will be placed in that context. An interview with a welfare recipient is only fascinating if the reader understands that this person is representative of the social system in some respect or not. 'Journalism is the destroyer of literature,' wrote the American critic and novelist Julian Hawthorne.[6] Whether that is true remains the question, but literature is all too often the destroyer of biography, at least where the literary form is used to camouflage a lack of proper research.

---

5 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (1910), in Bernard Groethuysen, ed., *Wilhelm Dilthey. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VII (Stuttgart and Göttingen: Teubner and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1927).

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

Theories are like building scaffolding. You need them to put the roof on a house, but you would be surprised if the contractor produces a house without removing those scaffolding. You save them for your acknowledgements chapter, because readers who sacrifice a few days of their lives to read a biography really want to know how the biographer has been working.

It is therefore better to speak of a 'scholarly sound biography' instead of a 'scholarly biography'. As long as a biographer adopts an academic research attitude, and in doing so properly deals with his sources, his work can be academically justified. That qualification, incidentally, says little about the quality of the biography itself: although the method can be correctly applied, it requires something else to have analytical insight, and writing skills. In her comprehensive contribution 'The Great Individual in History: Historicising Historian's Biographical Practice' Melanie Nolan has stressed 'that the biographical turn is an interdisciplinary wave but it overlooks the extent to which biography has been at centre of most historians' writing since Carlyle. In this regard, it is useful to consider historians separately from wider biographical developments. British, American and other historians writing in English continued to write biography throughout the twentieth century before 'the biographical turn'. Significant lives in history continue to be examined by historians and biographers contemporarily.' The scope of her article is illustrated by the fact that she begins with Robert Caro, the famous biographer of Lyndon B. Johnson, who wrote his autobiography under the title of *Working: Researching, Interviewing*, *Writing*. The chapters about the New York real estate developer Robert Moses can be considered as a long ode to investigative journalism. He urges the biographer to 'Turn Every Page'. The historiography of biography has broad fundaments, Nolan shows.

It is quite possible to think about biography in a theoretical way. A biography does not only have to be regarded as a purely literary or journalistic text: it is also a historical source, which can be used to say something about a historical moment, and about the life of an individual in a certain context. Researching biographies brings us to a separate research area, with its own method: *Biography Studies*.

For a large amount of context and reflections on the relationship between the individual and the structural you are at the right address in the world of biography. The biographer is the person par excellence who puts his hero in a larger historical picture, and explains how the biographee is shaped by it, what was the influence of a certain person on history. In this perspective the biographer works on two levels at the same time: he writes a life story, but also a small (cultural) history. Like an actor on a stage where the decor remains

most of the time in the background, sometimes it is accentuated or is moving forwards to bring the story of the actor better into the limelight.

The biography can be regarded as a corrective: by approaching a certain period from the consciousness and daily life of one person, it sometimes appears that historical reality was more complex than originally thought.[7]

All these considerations only become relevant when a biography is actually completed. All analyses are preceded by the writing process itself, which often has a much less rigorous course. In practice, as mentioned, there is ultimately a lot of freedom for the biographer himself – in addition to a scholarly project, biography is also a creative product. When studying a single life, there are countless perspectives to consider, and often there are widely divergent explanations for behavior and life choices. It is therefore up to the author to organize his research in such a way that the most interesting questions can be answered: the biographer can then use theoretical handles or insights to formulate those questions as sharply as possible, and to come up with innovative answers. As long as a biographer remains aware of the theoretical foundations of his work, all sorts of other approaches can be tried to arrive at the most interesting possible construction.

Fear of Theory closes with a discussion file, as it should be. In the 'Dossier on Microhistory' some competing views on microhistory are presented, that find their origin in a theoretical perspective on historiography. A lot has been written about microhistory, but a satisfying conclusion about its significance apparently cannot be made. It is striking that Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó published together a book about microhistory, although it now appears that they did not agree at all about this subject. The editors of *Fear of Theory* decided not only to publish the polemic between these two scholars, but also wanted to bring the discussion a little bit further, we hope, with 'The representativeness of a reputation' and 'Exceptions that prove the Rule. Biography, Microhistory and Marginals'.

7 Nigel Hamilton, 'Biography as corrective', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, eds., *The Biographical Turn* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 15–30.

The Missing Key: Theorizing Modern Historical Biography

Nigel Hamilton

Scholars of biography all agree: modern biography is still woefully under-theorized. Moreover most agree that – given its two thousand-year history and its continuing popularity in western cultures, as well as its central concern to discover, to share and to update the *truth* about the real lives of real individuals, past and present – this is deplorable.

Many reasons can be (and have been) adduced for this under-theorization. Since historical biography has not been studied or taught in universities – save for a select few – in the past, it follows it's been of scant theoretical interest to academics.[1] However interesting intellectually and philosophically, its potential discourse has simply lacked an academic *audience*, even a *market*, whether of teachers or students.[2]

Without theoretical justification, and with no faculty 'representation' in academia, biography has, moreover, suffered from continuing academic snobbery – scholars considering 'undertheorized' historical biography as of lesser import than the critical enquiry, say, of history or the history of subjects, from ideas to science and sports. In the words of Simone Lässig, book biographies have simply been dismissed in central Europe by the majority of scholars in the academy – not always without reason – as 'evidence of an antiquated and unreflective approach to history'.[3] Lässig nevertheless felt such snobbery, from her Braunschweig perspective, to be a 'largely German phenomenon', because biography in the US and UK 'has been and continues to be among the most highly regarded products of historical scholarship and is seen as one of the central bridges across which scholarly historical writing,' as she put it, 'reaches

1 Foremost in this respect is the University of Groningen, Netherlands, which has offered undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral classes and supervision in biography via its Biography Institute for many years. Others have begun, and are now following suit. For example, the City University of New York, USA, began offering Masters degree courses in biography in 2019, and hopes to offer doctoral degrees.

2 See Carl Rollyson, 'Liberation From Low Dark Spaces: Biography beside and beyond the academy', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 176–185.

3 Volker Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 1.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_004

beyond the ivory towers of academia, yet at the same time meets the highest standards of research'.[4]

'Reaches beyond' but has still not converted many purists in the ivory tower even in America and the British Commonwealth – at least, not enough to study or to teach it, let it be said.[5] Longstanding academic snobbery not only in Europe but in the English-speaking world was given further legs by the transatlantic arrival in the 1970s of French Deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida, who had derided *le grand récit*, as well as the very concept of 'an' author – let alone the author of a historical biography. As a result, many American – and British – historians retreated into miniature *récits*, such as those of the safer French *Annales* School of history, hoping they might in that way be less subject to attack. They thus 'withdrew into a largely defensive position', according to Lässig: waiting out the postructructuralist revolution until the *arrivistes* had not only completed their arrival but departed.[6]

The siege lasted several decades. Analyzing as it did the hidden structures of language and society, it offered catnip to thinkers and critics of history – thereby allowing critics to parade in new clothes as emperors of the modern intellectual and academic world.[7] In doing so, they certainly gave pause for much re-thinking and questioning of previous assumptions in the writing of history – though, it must also be noted, not a single one of such critics or their acolytes proved actually capable of writing a historical biography – at least a readable biography.

For their part practicing biographers simply ignored the deconstuctionists' deconstructions and theorizations, and went on with their job: to research and tell the stories of real people in *récits* large and small. Moreover, in a post-communist age of democratic individuation, they were inspired to spread their nets to include more women, members of minorities, and those left out of history, such as enslaved individuals. As Lisa Lindsay and John Sweet, the editors of *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, put it in 2014: 'By attaching names and faces to broad processes such as slaving, enslavement, identity formation, empire-building, migration, and emancipation, biography can illuminate the meanings of these large, impersonal forces *for individuals*' [my emphasis]:

4 Berghahn and Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency*, p. 1–2.

5 See Rollyson, 'Liberation', p. 176–177. The University of East Anglia has been an exception.

6 Rollyson, 'Liberation', p. 3; Nigel Hamilton and Hans Renders, 'B is for Biography', 'H is for History', 'R is for Religion', and 'T is for theory', in: *The ABC of Modern Biography* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), p. 19–20, 70–73, 160–161, 183.

7 Hamilton and Renders, 'H is for History', p. 71–72.

prompting more and more recognition of the biographer's increasing contribution to history as a 'biographical turn'.[8]

Lässig had already used the term 'renaissance of biography', to describe this work; others, remarking on the trend, referred to a Golden Age of biography that had expanded its purview, improved its forensic research methods, and produced outstanding works of readable prose – 'a remarkable effusion of excellent, thoroughly researched, and well-written portraits of numerous inspiring and repellant personalities that embody the crooked timber of our shared humanity', as one American reviewer noted.[9] All, however, without much discussion or discourse in the academy – often thereby leaving historians as uncontested purveyors and repeaters of second-hand, unquestioned myths, as I have found over the years. In the public mind, however, the relationship between history and biography reversed, with major biographers hailed as national 'historians'. In other words, where pre-war biographers had often required historians to correct their rose-tinted portraits, biographers were now correcting historians, at least outside academia.[10]

Would that one might record the same interesting reversal in the relations between literary biography and what we might loosely call 'literature', or Language Arts instruction. For there, in the field of literary instruction, deconstructionists had invaded and occupied the halls of academia, and this had gradually overwhelmed public discourse, too. Particularly with respect to memoir.

Take, for example, the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, which had been established in Hawai'i by George Simson in 1978. In 1995 the hitherto staid and traditional academic journal, founded to address biography, changed editorial hands, and gradually became an intriguing, often amusing

8 Lisa Lindsay and John Sweet (eds.) *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2014), p. 1 Also Joseph Miller, 'A Historical Appreciation of the Biographical Turn', in: Lindsay and Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, p. 9–47.

9 Volker Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency*, p. 3. See G. Tracy Mehan, 'A Golden Age of Biography', in: *The American Spectator*, March 16, 2007. Also Nigel Hamilton, *How To Do Biography: A Primer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 1. (The phrase 'Golden Age' was immediately contested, however, by the biographer Kathryn Hughes, who remained wedded in 2008 to the darker view of biography's state as expressed in the 1980s by Eric Homberger and John Charmley, editors of *The Troubled Face of Biography* (New York; St. Martin's Press, 1988). "Crisis' would probably be putting it too strongly', as Hughes put it. 'Sclerosis' might be better': Kathryn Hughes, 'The death of Life Writing', in *The Guardian*, June 27, 2008).

10 Nigel Hamilton, 'Biography as corrective', in Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn*, p. 15–30.

but mostly unreadable assembly of postructuralist and 'Life Writing' articles – every statement about biography or memoir having a built-in precursor or postcursor in brackets in its title, to denote an alternative, opposite point of view, lest it be contested by fellow deconstructionists.

As my friend and long-time editor, Craig Howes told me, when I visited Hawai'i in the early 2000s, this had become inevitable, since the journal was the offshoot of the University of Hawai'i's department of English, or English Language and Arts – i.e. literature – department, which had been overrun by academics glorying in deconstruction, poststructuralism, and postmodernism – an invasion it simply could not repel. The ideological, theory-driven lenses of the staff and contributors, moreover, were what excited other, outside academics and aspiring scholars and teachers who subscribed to the journal, or accessed it online through their universities, and who relished the neo-New Criticism focus on tight examination of literary text – eschewing informational biographical input, other than to draw attention to victimized people as victimized people. Such contributors and readers seemingly 'got off' on deconstructing the *texts* of dead memoirists and diarists rather than researching their actual lives as discrete histories of an individual, let alone their other literary or non-literary works. 'They are completely uninterested in real lives, real individuals, *per se* – in fact they are utterly uninterested in history, or politics,' Craig explained to me. Since Craig himself was learning Hawai'ian and becoming deeply conversant with Hawai'ian history – interviewing and assembling profiles of real-life Hawaiians, as he did so – he was somewhat ashamed at this trend, but saw it as an inevitable schism dividing the world of biography. There were those who were becoming more and more devoted to literary biography in the form of memoir, or 'literary voice' – especially the language of hitherto ignored or underbiographized subjects – on the one hand, and those who were actually interested in history: i.e. what real people had actually *done*, and how they had lived and died as real *individuals* in the past, on the other. As Craig later put it, in a brilliant essay in 2017, he had thus become the 'messenger' of an academic shift towards Life Writing, in which few if any readers of his journal were interested in articles addressing biography as information and *knowledge* about the past, but only in the art of language – language as modern weaponry in ideologically-driven gender-, pain- and existential trauma-memoirs.[11] Craig, in short, had simply

11 Craig Howes, 'What are we turning from? Research and Ideology in biography and Life Writing', in Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn*, (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 165–175.

felt compelled to go with the academic flow, in view of the prevailing *academic* market – even if it had almost no public interest, when compared with book readership numbers. To prove his point Craig gave statistics for citations by other academics of the many articles that he'd published in *Biography*, or was compelled by such academic forces to publish.

In sum, *Biography*'s fate as a journal of biography had become a neat paradigm for the cleft between biography as the history of real individuals and biography as Life Writing – or literary narcissism as some considered it.

I am oversimplifying, naturally, but this is how most practicing historical biographers, rather than so-called 'Life Writers', see the situation. Nevertheless even in the English-speaking world there are still, according to Carl Rollyson (who is both a distinguished academic *and* prolific biographer) real and severe academic *consequences* for those would-be faculty members who focus on biography as well-narrated *information*, since without theorization biography as a primary academic interest precludes tenure.[12] This despite the fact that many academics – think Ian Kershaw or John C.G. Röhl[13] – *themselves* write biographies, which offer them a larger audience for their historical expertise than strictly academic readers: a practice which they find personally and financially rewarding.[14] Doing so, however, is often considered in academia to be akin to vice, or gambling on the side.

Biographers themselves have not helped, in this respect. Since they have not had to study biography at college or university, they are largely ignorant of its history, or even the modest amount of theory that has attended the genre over the centuries. When it comes to the theorization of their chosen genre, biographers – once they practice their craft – reveal themselves to be largely uninterested, indeed their chosen genre's worst enemy. Faced with a *choice* between working on another biography or helping academics to theorize – which is to say, to identify and explore the idea and ideas behind biography – almost all biographers will choose to work on their next one! Quite why is an interesting question; I would seriously argue, as a practicing biographer, that

12 Rollyson, 'Liberation', p. 178.

13 John C.G. Röhl, *Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser's Early Life, 1859–1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *William II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *William II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 1900–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

14 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998) and *Hitler, 1936–1945: Nemesis* (London: Allen Lane, 2000). See Ian Kershaw, 'Biography and the Historian: Opportunities and Constraints', in Berghahn and Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency*, p. 27–39.

it's because the writing of biography becomes a literary and historical drug, an opioid – moreover an *addictive* drug – for the historical biographer.

I'll return to this later. First, though, let me suggest a perhaps useful metaphor for two distinct ways of looking at historical biography. (Biography, let us be clear, however – i.e. *not* Life Writing.) The metaphor I'd suggest is that of the seashell, at the edge of the ocean. Viewed this way biography may be seen to have a hard *outer* layer – one we can (and should) examine from any number of perspectives. *Inside* the shell, however, there's an *animal*; an animal we don't immediately see, but perhaps ought to examine more closely if we are to understand and theorize biography better.

Long ignored by the academy, the outer shell of biography is, as Lässig predicted in 2008, attracting more and more thoughtful attention. The following year, 2009, came Bernhard Fetz's edited volume *Die Biographie – Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie*, which offered fresh thoughts about the interdisciplinarity of historical biography; its challenges in terms of factuality; its new window on women and gender; its 'nationalistic' imprimatur; and its relationship to other arts and media, such as film.[15] The same year, in November 2009, Christian Klein edited his *Handbuch Biographie: Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien*: a major, 500-page overview of the genre, arranged under eight headings, with no fewer than fifty-nine subheadings. Rules; Central Questions; Forms and Narratives; Analyses; History; National Forms; Methodologies in History, Literature, Sciences, Art History, Music, Religion, Sociology, Politics, Education, Medicine and Psychology and Gender Studies: all were covered, as well as, finally, the Practice of Biography, ranging from Trends to Market and Legal Aspects.[16] This was followed, four years later, in 2014, by Hans Renders's and Binne de Haan's edited volume, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches From History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*.[17] The volume contained three main sections, devoted to 'Historiography of Biography Studies', 'Biography and History', and 'Biography and Microhistory' – as well as a further section on the difference between 'Biography and Life Writing'. Then, three years after that, in 2017, came Hans Renders's, Binne de Haan's and Jonne Harmsma's edited volume, *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, with sections on 'The biographical turn

15 Bernhard Fetz's edited volume *Die Biographie – Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

16 Christian Klein (ed.), *Handbuch Biographie: Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009).

17 Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches From History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014).

in the humanities', 'The biographical turn in fields of knowledge', and 'The biographical turn in academia and society'.[18] And finally in 2018, the year after that, came *The ABC of Modern Biography*, written by Hans Renders and myself, covering twenty-six aspects of biography, ranging from 'Authorized biography' to 'Theory', the 'Visual Arts', and 'War' in modern biography.[19]

The *outer* shell of biography, in other words, is currently receiving more and more thoughtful – and thought-provoking – attention in print. In university studies and teaching, too, one should note. The University of Groningen, the University of East Anglia, and most recently (in 2019) the City University of New York (CUNY) have been offering undergraduate, postgraduate masters and even doctoral courses, instruction and credentials in biography: thus helping to create a new readership that will, over coming years, be increasingly hungry for theoretical discussion and discourse around the genre.

Which brings us back to the biographer: the animal *inside* the shell.

We animals (I speak here as a biographer who's written some twenty-six books, primarily biography or books about biography) have a lot to say about *what* we do, *why* we do it, and *how* we fare when we do it.[20] But with a few exceptions, we're not only reluctant to take the time to offer help in discussing and theorizing 'our' genre, but we're almost never asked.

How different this would be if we were novelists, or short-story writers, or filmmakers! Not only would colleagues invite us to speak but newspapers, magazines and journals would be beating at our doors to know *how* we do it, *why*, *when*, *who for*, *with what trials*... Biographers? Not so much.

Who cares about the biographical animal, after all? Whether in reviews of biographies or the few forums in which biographers are invited to speak, only the product – the shell – is of interest. The biographer, in short, doesn't count. Or isn't counted. And therefore isn't quoted or consulted, for the most part, in the books that *do* address the theorization of biography. Updated in a new edition in 2017, for example, Wilhelm Hemecker's *Biography in History* claims to be 'an anthology of significant discussions of biography as a genre and as a literary-historical practice', covering 'the 18th to the 21st centuries'. It includes 'programmatic texts by authors such as Herder, Carlyle, Dilthey, Proust, Freud, Kracauer, Woolf and Bourdieu' – and carries a Note: 'Due to copyright reasons,

18 Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn* (London: Routledge, 2017).

19 Nigel Hamilton and Hans Renders, *The ABC of Modern Biography* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2018).

20 A notable exception, recording the inside story of a practicing biographer, is Carl Rollyson's *Confessions of a Serial Biographer* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016).

the chapter 'Sade, Fourier, Loyola' by Roland Barthes, 'could not be included in the ebook'.[21]

Now each of Hemecker's 'texts' is of interest; some are fascinating, to me at least. But a new 'textbook' on biography in theory that does not quote a *single* biographer since the last century? Not a single biographer who has produced work during the 'renaissance' or 'Golden Age' of biography?

Why are we not asked? Why are our research and writing papers not collected in any national or regional archive? In fact why is there no recognized center for biographers' papers in the world, on the lines, say, of the Massachusetts Historical Society and many others? Why is the animal in the biographical shell not encouraged to speak for himself or herself in this theoretical discourse, based on his actual work – work that is, after all, the very basis of the subject, biography? Have we biographers nothing to say as to our role, our aims, our objectives, our vision, our methodology, our experiences in undertaking, in processing, in producing, in confronting our 'audience', that would be of value to a theorist of the genre? After all Sports History and Sports Studies have become big in America; can one imagine, however, studying the subject without reference to a single actual player's experience and views of the game he or she has devoted his or her life to?

I have devoted half a century to historical biography. Like other practicing biographers I've arrived at a number of insights as a result of my work that may contribute to a better understanding of the genre than the one currently held by theorizers of the genre who survey biography largely from the outside. In an essay in *The Biographical Turn* I have, for example, instanced how modern biographers, by carrying out intensive forensic research of their chosen subject's real life, have proven not only willing but able to *question* – and where necessary amend, rectify and revise – historians' claims and assumptions about individuals and their actions – their agency in history: 'Biography as Corrective'.[22]

Let me propose some further examples – examples from inside the shell, but which may help us, in turn, to better theorize biography from the outside.

First up: *curiosity*. How often, in books and articles seeking to identify and explain the role of biography in our society, do we ever see the word 'curiosity'? One of the now-iconic attacks on biography was written by Janet Malcolm

21 Wilhelm Hemecker, *History in Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

22 Hamilton, 'Biography as corrective', in Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn*, p. 15–30.

almost twenty years ago, when reporting, as a journalist and critic, on biographers who'd attempted to tell the life story of the American poet, Sylvia Plath. 'Biography is the medium through which the remaining secrets of the famous dead are taken from them and dumped in the full view of the world,' Malcolm memorably claimed. 'The biographer at work, indeed, is like the professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through certain drawers that he has good reason to think contain the jewelry and money, and triumphantly bearing the loot away. The voyeurism and busybodyism that impel writers and readers alike are obscured by an apparatus of scholarship,' she sniffed, 'designed to give the enterprise an appearance of banklike blandness and solidity,' but was in truth merely masquerade for 'gossip and reading other people's mail. The transgressive nature of biography is rarely acknowledged, but it is the only explanation for biography's status as a popular genre.'[23]

Only? Considering Malcolm had never written a biography, this was a bold claim. The biographer as mere burglar and voyeurish busybody? Was this *really* why serious biographers, in the 'renaissance' of biography, were spending *years* of their lives reconstructing the entire life, or slice of life, of a chosen individual? It was small wonder Malcolm was embroiled for ten years in a lawsuit over fabrication, defamation and misrepresentation, moreover later produced an ill-reviewed biography of Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, *Two Lives*, that exhibited her failure to understand either a serious biographer's primary motive, or even that of most serious readers.[24] For *curiosity*, not burglary, is the main yet seldom-acknowledged driving force that underpins modern biography: curiosity *about a real individual*. An amateur theorist such as Malcolm may assume biography is either done 'for the money' (i.e. on commission), or for 'loot', or even in subservience to an ideological or personal agenda. Would not a serious theorist think to think deeper, though – and ask biographers *themselves* their motives? Malcolm, to her credit as a journalist, interviewed several biographers of Plath – yet seemed so driven by her obsession with burglary she never actually concerned herself with why, in reality, such biographers were writing their books! Nor is Malcolm alone in this regard. In fifty-five years of writing biography I have *never* been asked about my under-

23 Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 9.

24 Janet Malcolm, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). In the *Guardian*, Kathryn Hughes excoriated Malcolm's book on Sylvia Plath as having failed 'to have added a single fact to Plath's life', and *Two Lives* was no better as an actual biography, failing ever to 'quite come to the boil', despite the 'succulent project': 'Double Trouble', *The Guardian*, November 17, 2007.

lying – and enduring – motive, save recently by an aggrieved online warrior recently, when claiming a book I had written almost twenty years before, *The Full Monty*, was written solely to 'make money'!

Curiosity as motive: that, surely, is the heart of modern biography – for why otherwise would a writer spend the *years* of work necessary to write a serious biography, doing so? To find dirt? To prove an agenda, or support a pre-existing bias? Surely this aspect of biography, profound curiosity – which runs counter to the commemorative notion that characterized the early history of biography – needs to be factored into theoretical considerations as *the* primary motivation for undertaking a biography – as it is for reading one! After all, serious biography is not advertising, or the writing of a clever article – as Malcolm doubtless found when failing to chronicle the lives of Stein and Toklas. It involves and then requires, over a number of years of hard work (work that Malcolm proved unable to do), sufficient *curiosity* about an individual's life to sustain the necessary forensic investigation that the public actually expects, even demands, of a modern biography.

Personal *curiosity* has certainly been the initial spur for every biography I have ever undertaken. Likewise, *insufficient* curiosity has been the reason for a number of biographies I intended to undertake, but failed to write or complete! Insufficiency not only in terms of the questions I wanted to find answers to, but insufficiency of determination to *know* the answers to my curiosity. Thus, when I was pressed to write a second volume of my 1990s biography of President John F. Kennedy, after publication of *JFK: Reckless Youth*, I balked. The first volume had elicited furious condemnation by members of the Kennedy family for its portrayal of the parents of JFK, Rose and Joseph P. Kennedy, as well as the protests of fellow writers on the Kennedy payroll.[25] However, it had been well-received by JFK's friends, by reviewers, and by the public – indeed was soon made into an ABC television miniseries. But having interviewed many of JFK's closest surviving friends, I found I did not, at some deep level *want* to know more of what had then happened to him as a man, a *mensch*, behind the Camelot façade and liberal political agenda. I recoiled. My *curiosity* proved *insufficient*, in other words, to overcome my qualms.

Without taking this aspect into account in theorizing modern biography, the theorist will overlook or trivialize the very heart of the modern genre. Only by interviewing real biographers and real readers of biography will the theorist get closer to that organ. Recent book-length works such as Richard Holmes's

25 Nigel Hamilton, *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992).

This Long Pursuit, James Atlas's *The Shadow in the Garden*, Carl Rollyson's *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*, Claire Tomalin's *A Life of My Own*, Robert Caro's *Working* and Deirdre Bair's *Parisian Lives* are certainly pointing the way, in addition to conference papers and articles written by practicing biographers.[26] But given the failure of *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* to undertake such an approach to the theorization of historical biography (rather than memoir and Life Writing) much more remains to be done, if we aim to provide teachers and students of biography with the discussion points they need.

Another facet of biography missing from theoretical discourse around biography is – when viewed *inside* the seashell – *development* of character. In other words, not simply the information we need in order to provide a true factual chronicle of the course of such a life, but a better idea of the person's development over time.

For me, as a practicing biographer – and one who had to learn his trade 'on the job', given the lack of teaching or theorization in the 1970s – the importance of development of, and in, a subject's character had become clear when writing my first biography, *The Brothers Mann*.[27] Thomas Mann, after all, had been a die-hard German patriot and supporter of the Kaiser [Wilhelm] in World War I, even writing an 611-page literary manifesto, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, in 1918; he had later become ashamed of it, and would not permit it to be reprinted or translated into English in his lifetime, even though it had earned him a German doctorate.[28]

It was only when writing the life of Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery in the 1980s, however, that I was able, by forensic research, to trace the development of his character into a man who would inspire and command two million men in the historic invasion of Normandy (D-Day), in 1944. Development not only in his character, but in his developing approach to high command: one that changed him into a pioneer of training and man-management, but – given

26 Richard Holmes, *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer* (New York: Pantheon, 2016); James Atlas, *The Shadow in the Garden: A Biographer's Tale* (New York: Pantheon, 2017); Carl Rollyson, *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*, Claire Tomalin, *A Life of My Own* (New York, Penguin Press, 2019) and Robert Caro, *Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing* (New York: Knopf, 2019); Deirdre Bair, *Parisian Lives: Samuel Beckett, Simone de Beauvoir and Me* (New York: Doubleday, 2019).

27 Nigel Hamilton, *The Brothers Mann: The Lives of Heinrich and Thomas Mann, 1871–1950 and 1875–1955* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

28 Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1918). It was eventually translated almost three decades after Mann's death as *Reflections of a Non-Political Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983).

his abrasive personality – would put him in direct conflict with his superiors and peers.[29]

My point is: *no other modern non-fiction genre does this*, or *can* do this, in the way that a serious biography does. Memoir, being unsourced and unfootnoted, is immediately at a disadvantage. How can we *believe* its author – especially knowing how many so-called 'memoirs' have proved to be frauds?[30] A modern biography, by contrast, must pass scholarly muster: it is what its modern audience insists upon, that which gives it its heft and meat. Moreover the meat must be more than good-looking; it must, we insist as authors and readers, be *substantial*. And to be so, needs evidence of serious research, and must respond to what we are *interested* in: namely character: the genesis and development of character across time, even a lifetime.

We biographers are individuals ourselves; we know from our *own* lives that we grow up. mature, progress – and regress! The deconstructionist may rightfully question whether a human being has, in fact, 'a' character – at least one that is stable enough under a microscope to be defined as such, since it may be different at different times, and in different places. But within the impossible task of definition, the *attempt* to portray character and the development of character is, nevertheless, what we *do*: what we *want* to do, what we *aspire* to do, each in our own way.

Simply dismissing this as impossible, from a deconstructionist point of view, is like telling a portrait-painter to abandon figurative art because anything approaching realism is intrinsically unreal. Well, guess what, the biographer responds: we know it is imperfect! We know it is hard! But we want to try, nevertheless – and we find the forensic investigation to be part of our personal reward. For in investigating the contours and development of another life, we are symbolically investigating – and better understanding – our own! And ditto, the reader!

Thus, it's worth adding, the biographer reflects his or her age – both the year, in history and culture, and also his or her own years on earth. We are ourselves individuals, and human beings, not machines or AI robots. We tackle the stories of another person's life, and in doing so we consciously or unconsciously apply the same level of understanding with which we are willing to look at our own: a level of understanding which should provide the observer,

29 Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: The Making of a General, 1887–1942* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), *Master of the Battlefield: Monty's War Years, 1942–1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), and *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987).

30 Hamilton and Renders, 'I is for Identity', 'L is for Life Writing', and 'M is for Memoir', in *The ABC of Modern Biography*, p. 80, 108–110 and 111–119.

the theorist, with at least a measure of our *seriousness and ability in writing modern biography* – biography that will be read, and appreciated, by others.

Even within a biographer's own stable of works, one biography will, in this respect, be judged better than another. In other words, biography's quality is as much a comparative, even competitive matter as in fiction. Recognition of the biographer's research discoveries may well be an important criterion, in terms of freshness of portraiture, but the biographer's willingness and ability to follow and narrate the developmental course of a subject's life will be – in my view and in the views of many of my biographer-colleagues – what makes a biography good or even great. In seeing/witnessing the *development* of a chosen individual, the reader of a fine biography will get to know the character being portrayed in a way no other art or media can achieve with regard to real people. A photograph may encapsulate, in a snapshot, an individual's personality, from the photographer's point of view; similarly a portrait painting may do so – beautifully but statically. *Only the biographer* can trace the true *development* of the individual's character for good or ill across time – and that tracing is what, I believe, is most *valued* by the reader, since it conforms to something the reader knows in himself or herself: that we all change, as we live and encounter 'life', whether for the better and/or for worse. To ignore this facet of biography's significance, in theorizing biography, would be sad – a mistake akin to failing to acknowledge the importance of a character's character-development in a novel.

Which brings us back, finally, to the biographer-animal as *addict*. Other than in Carl Rollyson's recent book, *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*, addiction is an aspect of biography that I've rarely if ever seen addressed, even in the small yet growing numbers of works contributing to the theorization of modern biography. Professor Renders and I drew attention to it in *The ABC of Modern Biography*, but let me explore the phenomenon a little further here, if I may, for it might enable us to see deeper into the practice of modern historical biography – and by extension, the readership of biography.[31]

I have no statistics to prove this, but I would warrant there are very few biographers today who rest content with a single biography, once completed – prompting the question: *why*? What is it, seen inside the seashell, that can explain the addictive quality of the pursuit? After all, as we've mentioned, biographers until now have been invariably untrained as biographers, and thus – compared with other careers like those of historians and journalists – are

31 Hamilton and Renders, 'C is for Composition', in *The ABC of Modern Biography*, p. 31.

largely uneducated or self-educated in their own field, beyond their private, comparative reading.[32] We have, in effect, traditionally 'made it up' as a pursuit, 'as we go along'. But if we've satisfied our curiosity about an individual, as above, and have satisfactorily traced his or her development as a character, why go on to others?

Based on my experience as a founding member of BIO – the Biographers International Organization – as well as a former member of The Biographers Club when I lived in London, and a founding member of the Boston Biographers Group in Boston and the New Orleans Non-Fiction Writers Group in New Orleans (the cities where I now live) and The Biography Society in Aix-en-Provence – I know of no case where a biographer stops at one biography, unless it is followed by the death of the (actual, not deconstructive) author! In other words there seems to be something in the experience of exploring and narrating a real-life story that is not only compelling to undertake, but compels the author to then turn to further individuals' lives. As James Atlas wrote in *The Shadow in the Garden*: Once you've published a biography, you're a biographer.'[33] Is it because the lives *themselves* are so compelling to the biographer? Or is it a kind of learned reaction, once the first is done: like having to go on playing piano, once mastered?

I'm not sure I know. I remember, as a history student in the early 1960s, reading E.H. Carr's *What is History?*[34] I was impressed by Carr's honesty as a book-writing historian. In it he revealed how he could not resist starting to write, to draft, a preliminary version of his intended work at the same time as he did his research. It was a *compulsion* he encountered as a writing historian, in other words: flexing his fingers, even if he would subsequently revise and rewrite this version, over time.

Not only will many biographers experience the same compulsion (for setting down a first draft on paper is a useful way of clarifying ones thoughts and approach), but he or she will find that that compulsion stays in one's being after completing a biography. It is as if the biographer suddenly lacks a piano-like keyboard, once the book is done! The *doing*, in other words, becomes addictive – for having learned the mechanics and fulfillment, so to speak, of portraiture-in-prose (which is what biography is, in effect), the biographer yearns to experience the same challenge-and-pleasure again, by testing it on another life. And given that biography *is* corrective (if we accept that designated role in modern biographical and historical studies), the fact that a

32 See Atlas, *The Shadow in the Garden*, p. 103–117.

33 Atlas, *The Shadow in the Garden*, p. 161.

34 E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Random House, 1961).

growing number of biographers are not only flexing their self-educated fingers but applying them to historical characters, great and small, has – and will continue to have – a significant impact on historiography. And in consequence, this should surely be incorporated in the theorization of biography as a genre!

There are many more aspects of biography, as experienced by biographers as animals in the seashell – some of which I hope to address in a forthcoming book, *Why biography?* There's the ever-growing importance to the biographer – and thus the reader – of *verifiable* truth: that is to say, the truthful recounting of real lives in an American republic now awash in 'fake news' claims, and 'alternative facts'. There's the significance of getting to *know*, biographically, a real individual – or group of real individuals – as honestly, empathetically and even sympathetically as possible *as a contribution to 'anti-othering'*: thus helping overcome the growing, mass temptation to 'other' people – mostly minorities – who otherwise remain unknown and easily denigrated, or hounded. There's the psychological *fulfillment* a biographer – and subsequently the reader – gains from following the life path of another human being, as a quasi-passport to recognizing and accepting ones own…

These and other features of modern biography deserve to be taken into account in valorizing historical biography as *the study of the real individual*, as we pursue it today. To teach biography we need better theory, but theory based upon a better understanding of its *practice*. We need, urgently, to interview modern practitioners of the genre – the animals in the seashell.[35] *We* are the missing key to understanding biography: why *we* do it, why *we* think it important, what *we* see as the pitfalls, where *we* see ourselves intersecting with other disciplines and arts, how *we* relate to the purveyors of the genre – agents, editors, publishers, booksellers, audiences, readers – how *we* select our content and construct our narratives, how *we* train and develop our own voices, what are *our* rewards, material and spiritual – just as has been done, say, in documenting the history of jazz. Who would dare theorize the history and practice of jazz without taking into account its significant composers, vocalists and instrumentalists from their POV?

The business of recording and interpreting real-life individuals, in modern biography, is surely too important to be taken for granted. A qualitative as well as statistical survey of practicing biographers is urgently needed, if we are to adequately theorize the modern historical genre, while we are still alive. After all, in dystopian versions of tomorrow's AI-world, there may not be any more real individuals *to* biographize – or real biographers to 'do' it!

35 In 2019 already three major English-language biographers have died: Edmund Morris, James Atlas and Jean Edward Smith.

‘Have They Caught the Cambridge Structuralist Yet?’ Biography Writing and the Fear of Theory

Jeffrey Tyssens

The fear of theory in biography writing is definitely a major *topos* of the meta-literature treating the particular genre. Explaining this constellation is a rather complex matter. For a very long time, biography has not been a unified field, a genuine ‘champ’, in Pierre Bourdieu’s acceptance of the concept. It moved – and largely still moves – on the frayed stitching between different disciplines constituting the humanities and, to make matters even more ambivalent, it does move a lot outside of the hallowed halls of academia just as well. The issue here is not simply the *lack* of theory. As the eloquent German concept of

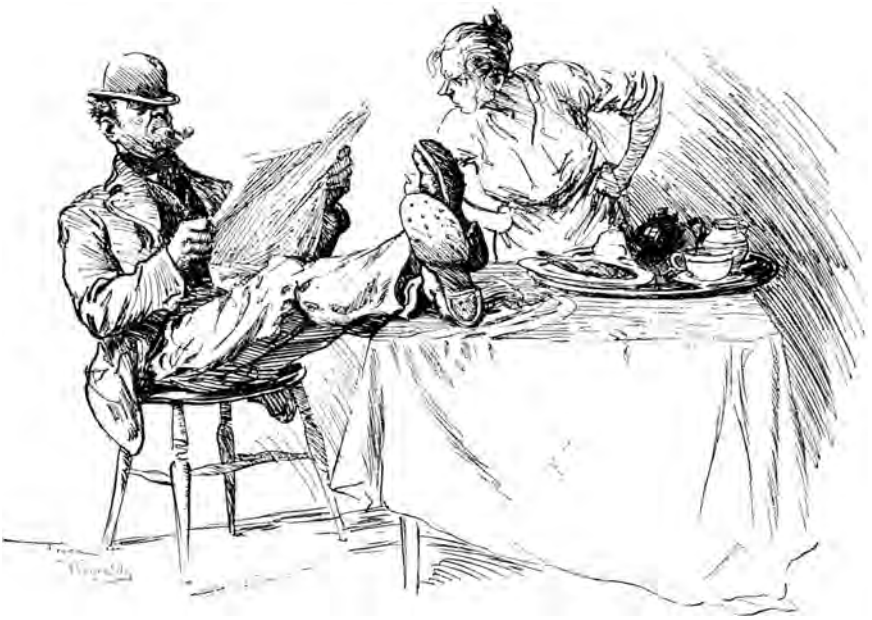


ILLUSTRATION 1 ‘Have they caught the Cambridge structuralist yet?’, illustration by Frank Reynolds in *Punch*, January 21, 1920 [with later caption added by J. Baxter, original caption: ‘*Wife* (*to amateur politician*). “Nah then – where do you think you are? In the ‘Ouse o’ Commons?”’].

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_005

Theorieresistenz clearly implies, it is also a more active *refusal* of theory which seems at stake. And there might even be more to it than meets the eye.[1]

I am sure it would be vain to try and analyze this configuration from the perspective of biography writing *alone*. Indeed, when observing the post-war humanities at large, a high status of theory was by no means generally accepted, very much to the contrary. The impact of so-called 'French theory' in the Anglo-American world, a perspective which usually limited theory to poststructuralism or postmodernism, clearly had polarizing effects.[2] At given moments, it looked, for some at least, as if any relevant reflexivity could be reduced to these poststructuralist stances or, for others, as if academe was mined by a clique of Parisian imposters and their acolytes. The 'theory wars' of those days did leave their mark in some key texts. With his classical essay *The Resistance to Theory* (1979), literary theorist and deconstructionist 'guru' Paul de Man did not only refer to the resistance of 'the material' against theorizing, but also showed, beneath his vague disparagement, some despair in the hostility within the literature departments themselves.[3]

While not a postmodernist himself, French sociologist Bourdieu, referring to the highly acerbic Barthes-Picard polemic on 17th–Century playwright Jean Racine, presented things as a kind of clash between the 'Ancients' and the 'Moderns'.[4] But others would certainly have described this well-known mid-1960s confrontation as one between the serious and the frivolous.[5] However that may have been, one cannot but be struck by the dichotomous nature of these debates which usually put a certain acceptance of theory at their heart. These controversies of the last four decades of the 20th century drew their virulent nature at least in part from motives that were more down to earth. Many, while ducking to avoid the bullets, saw things as the struggle between the arrogant and the ignorant, the flashy and the dull, between Morris Zapp and Philip Swallow, one could say, while not wanting to belong to either tribe.[6] Academic fashion ('French radical chic'), self-promotion by dint of esoteric

1 I refer to its use in one of the important introductory texts to biography theory: Bernard Fetz, 'Die vielen Leben der Biographie. Interdisziplinäre Aspekte einer Theorie der Biographie', in Fetz (ed.), *Die Biographie – Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), p. 5.

2 For an overview, see: François Cusset, *French Theory. Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats–Unis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).

3 Paul de Man, *The Fear of Theory. Foreword by Wlad Godzich* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002 (1986)), p. 3–20.

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984), p. 151–155.

5 Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1992), p. 153–158.

6 We obviously refer to the main characters of David Lodge's wonderful and surely very insightful campus trilogy: *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984) and *Nice Work* (1988).

jargon, defending one's turf against the others, they all had a part in the 'theory wars', so much so that one could ask what was actually at stake.[7] It is precisely what is implied in the first part of this essay's title. The *Punch* cartoon with this witty line referred to the broadly commented incident around English literature and film specialist Colin McCabe in the early 1980s, whose – mistaken – association with 'structuralism' was a motive for a tenure refusal.[8] But when push came to shove other matters were at stake than McCabe's 'Parisian' interests – a ordinary dispute on curriculum reform notably.[9] The cartoon also proved that at the end of the day only a small coterie of the initiated had any idea what the jargon eventually referred to. Were scholars running after a delusion of some sorts?

Let us turn to the issue of how to fit biography writing and the theoretical reflexion upon the genre into these intellectual developments. Even before structuralism and poststructuralism arrived, the conjuncture was, to say the least, by no means favorable towards biography, not in literary studies, not in historiography, not in the social sciences either. And clearly poststructuralism itself was not of a nature to foster the return of the subject. Or was it? With some hindsight we can say that, dialectically, it eventually did. Even in poststructuralism's or postmodernism's heyday, other sounds could be heard, somewhat muffled maybe, provisionally without an overwhelming echo, but they were present nevertheless. The defense of the subject by philosophers such as Manfred Frank were perhaps not currently read by scholars who would eventually rediscover the biographical, but writings like his did embody a kind of countercurrent that eventually was to prevail.[10] Hence, something started moving for biography, partly covered by the smoke of the theory war's guns, at

7 That was at least the evaluation of Camille Paglia, as quoted in: Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 12–13.

8 Our attention was drawn to it by: Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 28.

9 Colin McCabe, 'A Tale of Two Theories', in: *The New Statesman*, 26 September 2011.

10 Fetz rightly points at this important philosophical *oeuvre*. See: Bernard Fetz, 'Die vielen Leben der Biographie', p. 36 e.s. Frank had already written critically about poststructuralism as such. See: Manfred Frank, *Was ist Neustrukturalismus?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984). Fetz mainly refers to: Manfred Frank, *Die Unhintergehbarkeit von Individualität. Reflexionen über Subjekt, Person und Individuum aus Anlaß ihre 'postmodernen' Toterklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986). Interestingly, Frank's work was also translated into French, notably his *Unhintergehbarkeit von Individualität*. See: Manfred Frank, *L'ultime raison du sujet. Essai* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1992). It would be most interesting to investigate in depth its reception in France. See also: Elías Palty, 'The 'Return of the Subject' as a Historico-Intellectual Problem', in: *History and Theory*, XLIII, 2004, 1, p. 57–82.

least for the time being, but eventually with a quite remarkable comeback as a result, so much so that some have even claimed that a 'biographical turn' is taking place nowadays.[11] However that may be, this overall image needs some qualification and it must be stated as well that the process was accompanied by some serious birth pangs. My own discipline – i.e. history – is highly illustrative of this. Indeed, its longstanding, very strong tendencies towards structuralism nearly seemed to ostracize biography, at least from the universities' history departments. Consequently, not much of a reflexive impetus was to be expected from that side.[12]

In my own years as a history student (in Belgium in the 1980s), it was quite clear that the closer one was to French historiography, the lesser one had an inclination to sympathize with biography. Most of my Brussels teachers had been profoundly marked by the French *Annales ESC* 'school' and had copiously seasoned that plate with the postwar Marxist historians. A good example of that combination was Jan Craeybeckx, a much underestimated historian, who had been schooled directly within the Parisian temple where he took courses with Ernest Labrousse shortly after World War II. It comes as no surprise then that it was Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie who were quoted as the great models abroad, together with a Marxist squad comprising Jan Romein, Labrousse again, Albert Soboul, Michel Vovelle, Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. Interestingly, Claude Levi–Strauss was looked at (in comparison with Braudel, of course) but Michel Foucault was only mentioned briefly: *Surveiller et punir*, if I remember well, but certainly not *L'archéologie du savoir* and the like. For those who did not go all the way with the broad *Annales*-set of rejections and still held political history as a worthwhile field of research, biography of great politicians was simply not considered.

Surely, this was not a context where much scrutiny into the theory of biography was to be expected. If ever we would have had to write a biography, the only theoretical treatise I would have been able to quote in the late 1980s was Romein's *De biografie*, which I bought at an Amsterdam antiquarian bookshop sometime at the end of that decade but only read many years later.[13] If I looked into key meta-literature on historiography in my college days, it was the three part *Faire de l'histoire* series of Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora or, to tackle the newer developments, Le Goff, Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel's 1978 volume *La Nouvelle Histoire*, translating – mainly – the stance of the third

11 Joanny Moulin, 'Introduction – Towards Biography Theory', in: *Cercles*, 2015, 35, p. 1.

12 The concept is used in: Bernard Fetz, 'Die vielen Leben der Biographie', p. 26.

13 Jan Romein, *De Biografie* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1951).

Annales generation.[14] No clear biography-related reflexions were to be found in the first series. However: some small openings could be detected nevertheless. Already in the first series, Nora's contribution on the return of the event showed that something was changing.[15] In the second article collection, the text on *histoire immediate*, by France's most celebrated biographer Jean Lacouture, seemed to bring us closer to the sector of biography production, even if the actual contribution focused mostly on journalistic methods.[16]

But nobody really seemed to care for the implications for biography. It was the return to the small scale that mattered, not the biographical potential that could be – and actually was – related to it. With hindsight, it still strikes me that this return to smaller levels of observation, a shift we associated with the *Nouvelle Histoire* of the 1970s and 1980s – for us it was first and foremost Le Roy-Ladurie with *Montaillou* – and attended us a little later to the Italian *microstoria* authors, did not really trigger more attention to the biographical genre, even if the latter's eventual regain of interest was partly produced by the same *Annales ESC*–people – Le Goff first and foremost, with the important *Saint Louis* – that had formerly shunned it so vehemently. I presume that, if asked, we would have repeated Le Goff's own words that *biography* was indeed something else than this new attention for *the biographical*.

The theoretical juggernaut of postmodernism that, with quite some delay indeed, started rocking historiography's cradle in the 1990s was in itself not exactly of a nature of changing that configuration. It did draw attention to the 'Age of Theory' that had touched linguistics and literature long before most theory-timid historians had discovered it – the 1975–1991 period according to literary theorist Rabaté.[17] But, alongside apathy, suspicion of poststructuralist or postmodern approaches was broadly present.[18] As far as biography writing was concerned, the deliberate abandonment of the subject as a relevant unit

14 Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.), *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 3 volumes (**Nouveaux problèmes*; ***Nouvelles approches*; ****Nouveaux objets*); Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel (eds.), *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris: CEPL, 1978) (Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne) (the volume was later reedited in a shorter, articles-only version by Complexe in Brussels).

15 Pierre Nora, 'Le retour de l'événement', in: Jacques Le Goff & Pierre Nora (dir.), *Faire de l'histoire*. **Nouveaux problèmes*, p. 210–228.

16 Jean Lacouture, 'L'histoire immédiate', in: Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier & Jacques Revel (eds.), *La nouvelle histoire*, p. 270–293.

17 Jean–Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory*, p. 4.

18 For just one taste of the sharp discussions, a dialogue of the deaf rather, see: Perez Zagorin, 'History, the Referent, and Narrative: Reflexions on Postmodernism Now', in: *History and Theory*, XLVIII, 1999, 1, p. 1–24; Keith Jenkins, 'A Postmodern Reply to Perez Zagorin', in: *History and Theory*, XLIX, 2000, 2, p. 181–200; Perez Zagorin, 'Rejoinder to

of analysis was not of a nature to provide biography with new epistemological foundations.[19]

Or was it? A closer look shows that matters were not that cut and dried. It is indeed striking that one of the main voices proclaiming the death of the author – and thus one of the potential gravediggers of a biographical approach to literature – did not hesitate to return to biographical approaches, be it then of a very different nature. We are obviously referring to Roland Barthes. If authors were to be at the heart of, say, a monograph, then an approach was to be chosen Barthes which explicitly claimed to be close to the one Lucien Febvre had had with regard to Rabelais: as is well known, it was not Rabelais as such who was at stake for Febvre but the problem of atheism in Rabelais' time.[20] Surely, Barthes' *biographème* writings were something altogether very different than Febvre's classic, but that does not change the overall observation. Where postmodern historiography was concerned, other paths than biography were usually chosen, in particular by those who claimed to give rise to the linguistic turn, but then again, biography was not necessarily shunned.[21] An interesting example is Patrick Joyce's *Democratic Subjects*, where biographical materials on Edwin Waugh and John Bright were mobilized to problematize the class concept.[22]

That being said, the late 1980s, early 1990s did witness a gradual upturn for a more sophisticated theoretical sensibility with regard to biography, but then mainly outside of the postmodern and poststructuralist spheres. This was indeed the epoch when the well-known articles by Pierre Bourdieu and Giovanni Levi were published.[23] Levi's article – decidedly one of the most import-

---

a Postmodernist', idem, p. 201–209. See also: Oliver Daddow, 'The Ideology of Apathy: Historians and Postmodernism', *Rethinking History*, VIII, 2004, 3, p. 417–437.

19 It is no doubt significant that in periodicals which are close to postmodern thought, such as *Rethinking History*, reflexion on biography is not absent but nevertheless quite uncommon. For an example of biographical reflexion in this context, see: Alun Munslow, 'History and Biography: An Editorial Comment', in: *Rethinking History*, VII, 2003, 1, p. 1–11; José Miguel Sardica, 'The content and form of 'conventional' historical biography', in: *Rethinking History*, XVII, 2013, 3, p. 383–400.

20 François Dosse, *Le pari biographique. Ecrire une vie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011 (2005)), p. 219–220; Roland Barthes, 'Histoire et Littérature: à propos de Racine', *Annales ESC*, XV, 1960, 3, p. 524–537.

21 Which eventually turned out to have far less of an overall impact as it may have seemed at the start. See: Gérard Noiriel, *Sur le 'crise' de l'histoire* (Paris: Belin, 1996), p. 126–144.

22 Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects. The Self and the Social in Nineteenth–Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

23 Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', in: *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* (1986) 62–63, p. 69–72; Giovanni Levi, 'Les usages de la biographie', *Annales ESC*, XLIV (1989) 6, p. 1325–1336.

ant texts on the genre – showed how important the impact of *microstoria* had become for a theoretically informed way of writing biographies.[24] That goes as well for a lesser known but also quite incisive contribution by Sabina Loriga – later to write more extensively on the matter, notably with her book on earlier forms of biography – to Jacques Revel's volume *Jeux d'échelles*.[25] This was also the epoch of Le Goff's *Saint Louis*, whose introduction has immediately become a must-read for any biographer.[26]

Hence, even if it still happened partly below the radars of academic fashion, something of a major shift was in the offing. This shift clearly went beyond the renewed attention paid to prosopography by people who were influenced – among others – by Bourdieu's sociology in their historical mobilization of 'objectified' biographical material, such as ENS–historian Christophe Charle.[27] With the early 2000s and the publication of *Le Pari biographique* by François Dosse, in an earlier stage the author of a history of structuralism, interestingly, it became unavoidable to conclude that biography was back and that it could potentially indeed become something else than the kind of writing we traditionally associated with e.g. the bland *histoire bataille* earlier generations of historians had learned to despise.[28]

It cannot be denied that this 'biographical turn', as some like to qualify it, did foster a growing sense of theory around the genre. Never before has there been so much production of meta-literature on the biographical at large. At the same time, there is a very conscious re-appraisal or even a kind of re-discovery of older thought which more often than not proves to be still astonishingly fresh: one just has to read Loriga's pages on Wilhelm Dilthey to get a taste of it.[29] Furthermore, one can say that biography is indeed moving towards its constitution as something more of an autonomous scholarly field,

24 It is also the most constructive one, Bourdieu's text being more of an outright execution. For its particular context and background, see the particularly revealing article: Nathalie Heinich, 'Pour en finir avec "l'illusion biographique"', in: *L'Homme* (2010) 195–196, p. 421–430.

25 Sabina Loriga, 'Ecriture biographique et écriture d l'histoire aux XIXe et XXe siècles', in: *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, XXII (2010) 45, p. 47–71; idem, *Le petit x. De la biographie à l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2010); Sabina Loriga, 'La biographie comme problème'; Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à* l'expérience (Paris: Gallimard / Hautes Etudes, 1996), p. 209–231.

26 Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 13–27.

27 For just one example in a much broader *oeuvre*, see: Christoph Charle, *Les élites de la République 1880–1900* (Paris: Fayard, 2006 (1987)).

28 François Dosse, *Histoire du structuralisme* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1995, 2 volumes).

29 Sabina Loriga, *Le petit x. De la biographie à l'histoire*, p. 143–182.

a genuine *champ*. A number of specialized research groups have gained more visibility or have been newly created (the *Center for Biographical Research* of the University of Hawai'i or the *Biography Institute* at Groningen University). A specialized periodical has been dedicated to the genre, since 1978 already: *Biography – An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*. Book series on biography writing have been launched as well.

More importantly, at least for what concerns us in this article, is the observation that a constituted corpus of key texts is being elaborated. One can expect that a kind of theoretical *canon* on biography is now emerging, stretching from Virginia Woolf and Siegfried Kracauer upto the Bourdieu or Levi articles we mentioned before. It needs to be mentioned that important efforts have been done, certainly these last years, to compile these texts in a number of readers. I can refer to Bernard Fetz's volume *Die Biographie* (2009), Renders and de Haan's *Theoretical Discussions of Biography* (2014), Hemecker and Saunders's *Biography in Theory* (2017), Renders, De Haan and Harmsma's *The Biographical Turn* (2017) and Hans Renders & David Veltman's, *Different Lives* (2020).[30] This should augur well for a considerable broadening of a more theory informed praxis of biography. Only a couple of years ago, François Dosse wrote quite optimistically in this regard: 'Sous la passion biographique, toujours contemporaine, ce n'est pas le même qui revient, car la quête identificatoire d'un modèle, d'une vie maîtresse s'est transformée en quête de singularité, de la pluralité des possibles d'identités plurielles.'[31]

It sounds as a nice program, to say the least, and it is surely is not without potential. The fact that, at least since the 1990s, historians tend to have received a somewhat more elaborate theoretical formation than their predecessors, possibly as a happy consequence of the theory wars of those years, may hint in that direction. The question remains however if these promises are actually being fulfilled. I presume I will not be the only one to hesitate in his answer. On the one hand, I am convinced that tangible advances have been made. Historians with an open eye for the theoretical ascent in biography

30 Bernard Fetz (ed.), *Die Biographie – Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009); Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen, 2014); Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders, *Biography in Theory. Key Texts with Commentaries* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2017); Hans Renders and David Veltman, *Different Lives. Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020).

31 François Dosse, 'La biographie à l'épreuve de l'identité narrative', in: *Cercles* (2015) 35, p. 34.

writing have introduced these perspectives in even quite remote, traditionally rather theory–poor niches of historiography.[32] But does this imply that a general tipping point has been reached? That is an altogether very different matter.

We should be prudent in our judgment. Some fancy name dropping or snobbish jargonizing in an introduction does not mean that a biography (or any other scholarly writing, for that matter) is genuinely steered by a reflexive approach. Biographies without the set of canonic theoretical references are not necessarily lacking in deeper consideration of what product their author actually wants to produce: I guess everyone will know biographies that do the job pretty well without the 'compulsory' naming of names.[33] Nevertheless: one cannot escape the observation that *Theorieresistenz* does remain a stubborn factor, all efforts to overcome this flaw notwithstanding. Why? As always, the – tentative – answer must comprise different layers of analysis.

As far as historiography is concerned, allergic reactions against theory or sheer indifference is not new at all. Some will certainly remember the cliché of the polemics around postmodern historiography, with clever postmodernist contra simple-minded empiricists, but that image – even if clichés usually have a grain of truth in them – is too much a product of this *passé* discussion itself. Indeed, the postmoderns did (or do) not have a monopoly on theory. The point is that resistance against problem-based, reflexive history writing is a lot older. Again, France is an interesting example. It should be noted indeed that the impact of the *Annales* ESC-approach, however much a whole set of generations of historians have been formed with due awe before the school's great masters, should not be over-estimated, even within France itself.

In a quite revealing book on the school, Hervé Coutau-Bégarie showed quite convincingly that the narrative of its scientific hegemony over the French history departments – however high the quality of its research was, indeed – was also a question of a good PR-machine, clever policies of obtaining funds etc., but did not create a situation where the majority of French historians necessarily aligned themselves with the paradigm of the VI[e] section or the EHESS of

32 As I tried to do in the history of freemasonry and fraternalism with an introduction to a thematic issue of a highly specialized periodical. See: Jeffrey Tyssens, 'Fraternity and biography', in: *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, VI(2016) 1, p. 5–20.

33 If I should quote one example, it would be Steinke's book on Hessen's attorney general Fritz Bauer, where the author avoids elaborations on the juicy details of Bauer's private life and focuses in a rather concise book on what should indeed be the heart of the matter, i.e. Bauer's key role in (West) Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. See: Ronen Steinke, *Fritz Bauer oder Auschwitz vor Gericht* (Munich: Piper, 2018).

Braudel, far from it.[34] In one of the contributions of the *Essais d'ego-histoire*, the one by Raoul Girardet more specifically, it is stated explicitly that quite a lot of French historians regarded the founders of Annales ESC as just one group among others, not as some kind of an oracle, the polemics they waged being more of a *querelle de boutique* than the battle between light and darkness.[35] That means that a considerable part of the historians simply favored a business as usual approach. And if debates raged in the periodicals' columns, one best ducked and waited until the storm was over. Old school biographers must surely have done something very similar. I gather this kind of considerations remain valid until today and will probably remain an adequate description of the prosaic realities in academe at large and in biography writing in particular for a long time to come.

As far as biography as a successful, broad-audience genre is concerned, there is a further consideration to be made. It is important to keep in mind that since quite some time now history as a cognitive field, in the broadest acceptance of the term, is by no means a monopoly of the university. This does have serious consequences for the sensitivity for theory or its outright rejection. In a 2011 review essay, Ludmilla Jordanova, a historian at King's College, referred to the history boom she identified back then in terms of the *consumption of history*. Indeed, one can observe a broadening phenomenon of commercial exploitation of history with pictures, television or streaming series, touristic exploitation of all kinds of historical sites (some even artificially created), museum shop paraphernalia, popular magazines, and obviously the immense offer of books for a general audience.[36] Within the genre, biographical series cover quite a considerable part and are commercially very interesting ventures.

In his publication on biography writing in France, François Dosse elaborates on the dimensions of this commercial sector. French publishers such as Perrin and Talandier had and have a large biographical offer in their catalogues (Perrin more than 30%). The days when fashionable authors as Alain Decaux, who were held in very low esteem by university based historians, easily sold some 100.000 copies of every single title of their biographical oeuvre seem to be

34 Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, *Le phénomène 'Nouvelle histoire'. Stratégie et idéologie des nouveaux historiens* (Paris: Economica, 1983).

35 Interestingly, Girardet mentions the fall and rise of biography in that same reflexion. See: Raoul Girardet, 'L'ombre de la guerre', in: Pierre Nora (ed.), *Essais d'ego–histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 152–153.

36 Ludmilla Jordanova, 'What's in a Name? Historians and Theory', in: *English Historical Review*, CXXVI, 2011, 523, p. 1458.

over, as the publishing houses we mentioned tend to seek a somewhat stronger academic profile. But that does not imply at all that the big sales are realized by high-brow biographers, as the case of a Max Gallo shows (Dosse mentions figures over 800.000 copies for the first volume of his Napoleon biography: that easily *dwarves* about all biographies with more scholarly ambitions).[37]

In France, while not being as visible as e.g. in the USA, biography writing by journalists has defined a particular niche. The best known example is Jean Lacouture, a journalist who eventually styled himself as a professional biographer.[38] Lacouture is an interesting indicator of how a grey zone has developed in between the particular sphere of commercial publications and the scholarly endeavors of university–based biographers. The production of Lacouture deliberately moved away from the *Trivialbiographie* and came closer to heuristic approaches that were acceptable to the academic field. As we saw, he was duly recognized as such. The other way around, established scholars have also taken the opposite trajectory, i.e. producing biographies with brief source lists and bibliographies indeed but – by fear of scaring off the buyers, no doubt – dropping the traditional critical apparatus altogether. Something of this kind is shown by the book Michel Winock wrote on Germaine de Stael, a first classical, narrative (and rewarded) biography after 35 years of publishing in the well-known scholarly formats.[39] It hardly needs arguing that this large and commercially lucrative sector quasi exclusively imposes empiricist perspectives. *Theory does not sell.*

Before we take our analysis just one step further, let us first sum op what levels of refusal we have met so far and, while doing so, evaluate what direction this refusal has actually been taking. Let us do so as well in a upward movement from the mere prosaic to the more abstracted. First of all, there is the *Theorieresistenz* generated by the commercial outlets for biographers, whose expectations about the biography-consuming audience compulsively drive towards an empiricism-only market strategy. Then, there is the long-standing fear or even the outright aversion against theory among biographers as such, whether or not this is a feature of considerable fractions within their respective academic biotopes (we mentioned this with regard to historians, but they are by no means the only group for whom the observation is valid). In both cases, one could say that it is the resistance of the biographical *factory floor* which is at stake. Our third level is more abstract. Indeed, we had

37 François Dosse, *Le pari biographique*. p. 17–43.

38 Dosse, p. 123–132.

39 Michel Winock, *Madame de Stael* (Paris: Fayard, 2010).

to observe that large fractions among those scholars who did prove theory sensitive (reflexive and problem-oriented historians, literary theorists and the like) actively refused even to consider theorizing on biography, quite simply because they judged the operation to be more or less irrelevant. These days are by-gone, even if some echoes still linger on, here and there. Nevertheless, one could say that, at least for a considerable part of the twentieth century, theory refused biography. This brings us to a fourth level, where, so to speak, the direction of the resistance is reversed. Here, it is not the biographical material that produces the back pressure, if we would transpose Paul de Man's reasoning to our particular subject matter. What is at stake, is the refusal of theory by biography *in se*.

To come to grips with this, we must turn to French sociologist Jean-Claude Passeron, mainly to one text of his which is quite rarely studied or quoted in a context of biography-related reflexion: so far, it is nowhere to be found in the compilations of the 'classics' but it definitely deserves a place among them.[40] In the early stages of his career, Passeron was close to Bourdieu, but after having co-authored an essential treaty with the latter and Jean-Claude Chamberedon, *Le métier de sociologue – Préalables épistémologique* (1968, several times re-edited since), he gradually put some distance between himself and the Bourdieu school.[41] Passeron moved closer to sensibilities he shared with historians and the like (Jacques Revel and Bernard Lepetit have been avid readers of his work).[42] His collaboration with precisely Jacques Revel on the epistemology of case based research – obviously of consequence for biography writing as well – is quite significant in this respect.[43] For our concerns here, it is his magnum opus of 1991, *Le raisonnement sociologique*, which is of prime importance, more in particular the chapter 'The Script and the Corpus. Biographies, Flows, Itineraries, Trajectories'.[44] Let us look a bit closer at this perspective.

---

40 There are a number of exceptions, of course, but not all that many. One of them is – revealingly – Jacques Le Goff, again in his well-known introduction to *Saint Louis*. See: Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, p. 26.

41 Much is to be found in a voluminous special issue dedicated to his work: *Revue européenne des Sciences sociales*, XXXIV(1996) 103.

42 Bourdieu had far less sympathy for the historians and their trade. I can testify this personally: when I attended his courses at the *Collège de France* in spring 1998, he spoke quite denigratingly about them.

43 See mainly the first chapter of: Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel (eds.), *Penser par cas* (Paris: Editions de L'EHESS, 2005).

44 Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique. L'espace non-poppérien du raisonnement naturel* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), p. 185–206. An earlier version of the chapter was published as: Jean-Claude Passeron, 'Biographies, flux, itinéraires, trajectoires', in: *Revue*

Writing in the wake of the discussion Bourdieu's 'Illusion biographique' had provoked, Passeron presented his own critical thoughts on biography but, on top of a different overall tonality, immediately stressed not to conduct a witch trial against it, quite on the contrary. Biographical material is historical material like any other, usually richer or more complete than average and hence often indispensable. If there is to be any hesitation, he wrote, it is about the choice of its treatment: 'once a biographical method is brought into operation, which is something very different from the art of literary narrative or suggestion, which only reason by synecdoche – in other words, once there is reasoned choice of the rules of analysis that allow both the identification of 'pertinent features' of a description and the application of a protocol of data processing derived from hypotheses relating to biographical succession, structure or memory – everything in a sample of biographies is good to analyse.'[45] This is the crucial point, obviously, as it imposes an intellectual self-discipline biographers often try to avoid or, perhaps even more significantly, they are just as frequently not aware that this structuration of one's research object would be of any necessity to them. Passeron delves deep into this last issue.

Because of its direct appeal, of the 'automatic nature of the semiotic operations of narration', biography presents an 'exaggerated power of intelligibility'.[46] As it has this expressive power right from the start, biographical analysis seems 'rich enough to dispense with the need for any methodological effort'. According to Passeron, researchers tend to 'avoid drawing too many consequences from the fact that this power is always under the influence of a literary model that is simply waiting for it to relapse into literature'.[47] One way or another, the biographer has to make extra efforts to withstand the seduction of this particular Sirens' song. Biography's return into the graces of academia has not necessarily changed this for the better: often one observes nothing more than a 'light grooming'.[48] That is obviously not sufficient. Passeron states that one can indeed gain from going beyond the too mechanist, too abstract forms of a naturalistic determinism, but then only if one proves able to deliver a superior product. The trappings of this literary order of biography, which is deemed 'too vivid' due to its implicit theoretical models (whether the genetic or the essentialist one), must be overcome by a 'work of reconstruction' –

---

française de Sociologie XXXI (1990), no. 1, p. 3–22. In this paper, I will refer to the English translation Jean-Claude Passeron, *Sociological Reasoning: A Non-Popperian Space of Argumentation*, translated by Rachel Gomme (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2013).

45 Jean-Claude Passeron, *Sociological Reasoning*, p. 332.

46 Passeron, p. 318.

47 Passeron, p. 324.

48 Passeron, p. 317.

something which the genre, out of its own nature, seems to be countering.[49] At the end of the chapter, Passeron offers some ways of structuring such a biographical research protocol, prudently moving on a middle ground between the extremes of a 'theoretical anti-humanism' on the one hand and the 'literary cause of the moving experience of duration' on the other.[50]

One of the consequences of an absence of method and of the concomitant illusion of immediacy of the biographer's understanding, is what Passeron qualifies as the *biographical utopia*. As the question of the pertinent and the non-pertinent is not even considered, everything becomes pertinent: 'it becomes emotionally difficult to let go of the least part of it, since each tiny part contributes to the unrepeatable flavor of the narrative'.[51] It is a problem well-known to all observers of the biographical genre, which goes way beyond the identification of the biographer with the biographee.[52] This utopian quest for a total knowledge of an individual, Passeron states, eventually implies the impossibility of ever putting an end to the biographical operation. This may just be somewhat of an overstatement – Sartre's never finalized biography of Flaubert serves as the reference here, but there are sufficient counter-examples, as our American presidential biographies have shown – but it does adequately point nevertheless to these long years of often herculean efforts biographers develop time and again, not necessarily to their own satisfaction when the end is reached, as 'the biographical passion will never be satisfied'.[53]

---

49 These implicit models refer to a *post hoc propter hoc*, 'genealogical' style of putting order into the material, respectively to the strong tendency of treating the biographee as the incarnation of an essence indeed, which – Passeron's *caute* is of major importance here – can also comprise the identification of his or her 'typicality'. See: Jean-Claude Passeron, *Sociological Reasoning*, p. 324–326.

50 Passeron, p. 319. Interestingly, Passeron also shuns bad heuristics under guise of sheer theoretical retorics, that of 'information poverty under the richly decorated gala uniform of grand theory'. See: Passeron, p. 339.

51 Passeron, p. 320.

52 There is a plethora of examples of these sheer endless biographies. Let us just quote a couple that nicely illustrate two varieties of the same bulimia of the detail, both in the sector of American presidential biography. So e.g. George Washington who was bestowed with numerous biographies of course, but more in particular with Freeman's largely admirative biography of no less than seven volumes and several thousands of pages. See: Douglas S. Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography* (New York, Scribner, 1948–1957). Robert A. Caro's monumental biography of Lyndon B. Johnson, a most critical account this one, also takes four volumes and way over 3000 pages to make its point. No wonder even Johnson's weird restroom habits are abundantly treated. See: Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 1982–2012).

53 That is no coincidence at all. Bourdieu's 'Illusion biographique' also had Sartre's unfinished *L'idiot de la famille* as an important part of its frame of reference. Bourdieu's later

As far as I am concerned, Passeron goes to the heart of the matter. It is not just the habits of theoretical indifference (or the profession's allergy to it) or the laws of the book market which are at stake. It is even more than the suspicion high quality historiography has maintained for such a long time against biography. As we saw, this phase is behind us nowadays. But the basic problem remains, as a sword of Damocles continuously pending above the biographer's head. This constant seduction of a literary model imposing itself almost 'spontaneously', its insidious sapping of any conscient methodological endeavor, and certainly this drift into a limitless compilation of even the smallest of biographical details, effectively pushing every other consideration aside, constitute more than a 'cold' scholarly issue. If biography acts as a kind of an ogre, a Behemoth of sorts swallowing the biographer and his faculty to apply some of the basic rules of scholarly research, it is not only rationality that is implicated. It even goes beyond the old *topos* of empathy and identification. With his incisive evaluation of the eternal quest of the biographical detail as a form of 'Lust', Bernhard Fetz pointed in that direction too.[54] This fear of theory which still is so common among biographers, a fear for which handbooks and text compilations – their undisputable value notwithstanding – all too often fail to provide an adequate medicine, seems to relate, at least in part, to a number of affective drives biography triggers within the biographer. I presume it is mainly on this level of reflexion that meta-literature on biography can still achieve some major theoretical and methodological headways.

analysis of the 19th-Century literary field, in *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (1992) more in particular, precisely took Flaubert as his basic material; Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique*, p. 326.

54 The image obviously comes from the introductory note (with reference to Hobbes) of: Franz Neumann, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London, Gollancz, 1942), p. 5; Bernard Fetz, 'Die vielen Leben der Biographie', p. 21.

Biography and Emotional Practice

Kerstin Maria Pahl

1 Introduction

Good biography requires empathy. 'To delineate with force and truth,' James Stanfield wrote in 1813, 'the writer must enter intimately into the character he would exhibit – he must, for the time, endeavour to see things in the same point of view, and conceive sentiments of the same nature and feeling.'[1] Stanfield was, of course, not the first to assert that feeling was integral to biography. Sympathy flowed abundantly when one was placed 'in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.' If done correctly, Samuel Johnson stated in the mid-eighteenth century, biography swayed readers by 'parallel circumstances, and kindred images, to which we readily conform our mind.' All of this, the sympathy, the confirming of the mind, was 'produced by an act of the imagination,' an 'act' that applied to both readers and writers: before the audience could sympathize, authors of biographies had to do the same. They had to delve deep into the 'domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue.'[2]

Like Stanfield, Johnson was not without predecessors. His theory streamlined a biographical tradition that had crystallized in the latter half of the seventeenth century, which foregrounded intimacy and interiority. Although this tradition is often set in contrast to historical biography, which mostly delineated the *Lives* of great men, and sometimes women, and focused on deeds and action, its exploration of intimate conditions was originally developed in such biographies of esteemed individuals. Plutarch, the model of modern biographers, wrote in his *Life of Alexander*: 'my Design is not to write an History, but Lives. […] So I shall endeavour by penetrating into, and describing the secret Recesses, and Images of the Soul, to express the Lives of Men, and leave their more shining Actions and Achievements to be treated of by

1 James Field Stanfield, *An Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography* (Sunderland, 1813), p. 54.

2 Samuel Johnson, 'no. 60,' in *The Rambler*, vol. 2 (London: 1752), p. 207, 208, 211.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_006

others.'[3] Eventually, this allowed access to one's own 'recesses,' making *Lives* the training grounds for the refinement of one's own feelings. In developing how this 'penetrating' was to be done, Johnson and Stanfield both theorized that in biography, feeling provided the decisive link between author, subject, and audience.

Since Johnson and Stanfield, theories of biographical practices have multiplied, but their initial interest in feelings still resonates with twenty-first century biographical research. Although early theorists wrote about how to explore and delineate 'character,' 'sentiment,' 'sensibility,' or the 'motions' of the 'soul,' rather than 'emotions,' their approach was very often geared toward a topical concern: how to keep track of the feelings of their protagonists. While intricate methods have been developed over the decades to approach how to best 'get to' the feelings of human subjects, the question of how to do so most effectively is still unresolved.[4]

Introducing the history of emotions into considerations on biographical research, this chapter has two interrelated aims, one historical and one methodological. It will map the importance of feelings in the history of biographical theory to subsequently enquire into approaches to emotions in biographical research.

Biographical and historical research have long shown interest in understanding how and what people felt, although the ephemeral quality of emotions makes it difficult to get hold of them. Researching emotions means enquiring both into what they are and what counts as their sources – and as the historical overview in the beginning has shown, neither the questions nor the suggestions of how to address them are new. Following the historical perspective, I will outline different methods that have been proposed for researching emotions. The theory of 'emotional practices,' with its options and limitations, will take centre stage, especially in how it accounts for intertwining the individual experience of emotions with the social structure that shapes not only their expressions, but experience itself. In using a historical perspective as a springboard, I offer not only a survey of the methods in the history of emotions, but will also tentatively historize them to show both their salience and their urgency.[5] My approach to emotions in biographical research is

3 Plutarch, 'Life of Alexander,' trans. John Evelyn, in *Plutarch's Lives*, vol. 4 (London: 1683–1686), p. 245–246.

4 Phil C. Langer and Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad, 'Psychologie und Biographieforschung', in *Handbuch Biographieforschung*, eds. Helma Lutz, Martina Schiebel, and Elisabeth Tuider (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), p. 181.

5 On the history of the history of emotions see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 40–74; Thomas Dodman, 'Theories and

historical rather than sociological or psychological, but despite the methodological gap, approaches to exploring emotions benefit all disciplines because of a shared interest in how emotions factor into decision-making. Emotions in life as well as in *Lives* are often read as relational and goal-oriented, with the goal ranging from some 'plan' or 'accomplishment' to simply communicating how one feels.[6]

Although this is largely a theoretical article, the nineteenth-century Irishman James Stanfield will serve as a guide through the thicket. As an historical example of biographical theory and biographical research theory, he addressed many of the aspects historians and biographers still grapple with today: how to find out what made the person tick and how this affected their 'mode of acting.'[7]

2 Emotions and Historical Biography Theory

James Field Stanfield's *An Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography* (1813), while arguably the first consistent framework of biographical theory, is much less known than Samuel Johnson's towering theory. It provides, however, a valuable entry point as it testifies to the century-old interest of biographical researchers in emotions, while also considering feelings as integrated categories of a person's life and thus a person's *Life*.[8] Emotions, Stanfield contended, are not supplements to an individual, but are rather essential to understanding them and thus critical to researching and subsequently writing biography.

Methods in the History of Emotions', in *Sources for the History of Emotions*, eds. Katie Barclay, Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, and Peter N. Stearns (New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 15–25; Rüdiger Schnell, *Histories of Emotions. Modern – Premodern* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), p. 22–80.

6 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 21–31; Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 14.

7 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 208.

8 Unlike in psychology, where a distinction is drawn between emotions ('the collection of changes in body state that are induced in myriad organs by nerve cell terminals, under the control of a dedicated brain system, which is responding to the content of thoughts relative to a particular entity or event') and feelings ('the perception of all the changes that constitute the emotional response'), I will use feelings and emotions interchangeably in accordance with the usage that has become established in historical studies. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 139. For the distinction see also William James, 'What Is an Emotion?', *Mind* 9, no. 34 (April 1884): p. 189–190.

Judging from the various terms used in his *Essay*, including sentiments, passions, feelings, sensations, temperaments, affections, propensities, desires, or energy, to broadly refer to character and character traits, Stanfield considered sounding out the 'philosophy of the human heart' to be the major aim of biography.[9] A biographer had to understand what could be called a person's emotional disposition, and this meant to both try to feel like them and to make use of as many sources as possible that allowed glimpses into the 'undisguised expression of the genuine character.'[10] Stanfield, however, explored not only how subjective feelings come to be, but also their driving force, touching on what emotion research classifies under the valence, intensity, and goals of emotions.[11] Any process of action is set in motion by a certain end, which inspires the passions, especially the passion to obtain this end, thus making people seek out the means to accomplish it: 'the sensibility of the heart attracts the faculties of the understanding; and in the felicity of their union a man feels capable of executing those bold achievements that arrest the attention and admiration of less-confident observers.'[12]

Crucially, Stanfield did not only demand sympathy and research into emotions, but he provided the means for how to 'do' them. Sympathy and understanding developed on the basis of a detailed enquiry into a person's world. This extended from the duration of their mother's pregnancy to their upbringing to their life's circumstances to their actions, writings, and much more.[13] To understand a fellow being, nothing was beneath a biographer's notice, even though not all material would eventually make it into the final composition. 'In the putting ourselves, mentally, in the situation of others,' Stanfield wrote, 'in order to appreciate and possess ourselves of their views, and their feelings, no little effort must be used to exalt or inflame our imagination to the absolute condition of enjoyment, suffering, or exertion, by which the personage is actuated. […] Attention to objects and circumstances, and to the nature and degree of *emotion* they excite in the person under inspection, is a key which opens a passage to the recesses of character.'[14] This detailed inspection was necessary because of each person's malleability. Before coming of age during what would now be understood as puberty, people were 'one tender mass of

9 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 210.
10 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 181.
11 Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. 21–25.
12 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 267.
13 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 198–263.
14 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 124–125.

susceptibility.'[15] There was 'personal organization [...] predisposing the individual to a more or less lively reception of certain impressions,' but whatever happened to them influenced how they developed.[16]

Contemporary dictionaries loosely distinguish between empathy and sympathy, the first often denoting the sharing of feeling proper, while the latter is more akin to being affected by another's condition without, necessarily, sharing those feelings. Historically, however, sympathy, a term older than empathy, as elaborated by Adam Smith and David Hume, comprised both compassion for someone as well as the ability to share or have feelings similar to the other. Stanfield's sympathy could also be called mimetic feelings: the authors – and subsequently the readers – should feel as the biography's protagonist has felt in a given situation. With this, however, Stanfield still used a universalist idea of sympathy to access feelings, which were, themselves, conceived of as universal. He thought that they could identify with their protagonists because feelings are, always and everywhere, roughly the same: 'The diversity, arising from temperament, condition, situation, or accident, forms the individual distinction, which, though it may modify, cannot destroy the instinctive propensities or common characteristics which constitute the species.'[17]

3 A History of Emotions Perspective on Biographical Research

Throughout the 200 years separating Stanfield from today's researchers, identifying the place of emotions in people's life-stories has become ever more complex. For one, the idealist conviction that feelings are universal has been swiftly discarded. Emotions are now commonly understood to be historically and spatially specific, and it is their contextuality that has made them the object of historical study. Growing out of the French Annales school's enquiries into the history of mentality, the history of emotions is now a burgeoning field, aiming to uncover not only what people felt, but also the impact of emotions on both the individual and the societal level.[18] Navigating between feeling rules, individual experience, and their intertwining, the history of emo-

15 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 207.

16 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 203.

17 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 277. For a critique of the universalist ideas underpinning *Einfühlung* see Clifford Geertz, '"From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', in Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 55–70.

18 For an overview see Plamper, *History of Emotions*. For emotions in society and politics, see for instance Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest and New

tions has produced a wide array of approaches to investigate the emotional lives of historical figures.[19] As emotions are felt and displayed by people, any history of emotions approach necessarily touches on biographical research, but both have largely divested themselves from what early theorists had in mind when they talked about sympathy. Stanfield's call on biographers to feel for and like their subjects runs close to what in education research is known as 'historical empathy.' Although the boundaries of the history of emotions are somewhat permeable, historical empathy's 'cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures' must be distinguished from research that understands emotions as operative in the individual and social structures.[20] 'While we cannot any longer simply begin an empathetic account of the past,' Rob Boddice has written, 'we can attempt to understand what it felt like to be *there*, *then*, according to the terms of historical actors themselves, and through a thorough reconstruction of the affective worlds in which people *moved*.'[21] Approaches to 'what it felt like' often draw on a micro-historical approach to do justice to embedded personal experience.[22] This approach is buttressed by findings from material culture studies, theories of embodiment, historical anthropology, or practice theory. Researchers more interested in knowledge on emotions turn to discourse analysis, the history of science, and literary or art history. But virtually all disciplines and methods can be and are made use of, and often simultaneously. As emotions are believed to be embedded into the entirety of the world, emotions are carefully circled in on by analysing as

---

York: Central European University Press, 2011) and *Mächtige Gefühle. Von A wie Angst bis Z wie Zuneigung – Deutsche Geschichte seit 1900* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2020).

19 On the link between rules and enactment see in particular Peter N. and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): p. 813–836; Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. 63–137; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 56–75.

20 'Historical empathy is the process of students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions.' Jason Endacott and Sarah Brooks, 'An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model for Promoting Historical Empathy', *Social Studies Research and Practice* 8, no. 1 (2013): p. 41. More recent texts draw attention to the fact that historians should be more aware of their own emotionalized approach to writing history. See Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 290–293; Benno Gammerl, 'Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges', *Rethinking History* 16(2012)2: p. 169–171.

21 Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion, 2019), p. 9.

22 See Rob Boddice, 'Neurohistory', in *Debating New Approaches to History*, eds. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 301, where he argues that 'individual or group perceptions are not mere points of view or subjective perspectives on an objective reality, but rather reliable statements of reality as it was experienced.'

many sources as possible, ranging from documents to performances to objects to spaces.

The variety of often overlapping methods reflects the ontological problem that what constitutes an emotion per se is by no means settled, and thus forms part of almost every comprehensive discussion on the subject.[23] Following the arguments brought forward by psychologists and neuroscientists, historians and anthropologists understand emotions as springing from a complex interactive process of biology, cognition, and culture.[24] The brain as a plastic entity not only triggers experience, but constructs it in response to context.[25] While some elements of emotions are hard-wired, others depend on context, although approaches differ as to the share, the place, or, indeed, the importance of the 'hard-wired'. According to historian Susan Matt, emotions have 'a neurological basis but are shaped, repressed, expressed differently from place to place and era to era.'[26] The different expressions make them researchable, and while historians largely refrain from making statements on the 'seat' of emotion productions, most researchers point out that it is also important to understand expressions as intrinsic parts of experience, even though they may not completely enfold it.[27] First, experience and expression, plus the norms that govern them, are in a continuous feedback loop, informing and shaping each other. Emotions are, as Lisa Feldman Barrett has argued, constructed through an interaction of the brain networks with the body and contextual and conceptual knowledge: 'An emotion is your brain's *creation* of what your bodily sensations mean, in relation to what is going on around you in the world.'[28] Second, the dichotomy propounding the idea that someone's 'inner' life is markedly different from their 'outer' life is itself historically spe-

---

23 See most recently Thomas Dixon, 'What is the History of Anger a History of?', *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 4 (2020): p. 1–34.

24 See Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. 3–62, and Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 9–25.

25 Boddice, 'Neurohistory', p. 301–312.

26 Susan J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out', *Emotion Review* 3(2011)1: p. 118.

27 For a thorough discussion of the methodological problem of how to access experience, including the question if one can really speak of emotion if the object of the study is actually 'discourse,' 'concept,' 'idea,' 'social norms,' etc. see Schnell, *Histories of Emotions*, p. 22–46. Schnell argues that most research claiming to investigate emotions is actually traditional intellectual history or discourse analysis – an entirely legitimate approach, but not as new as claimed. See p. 31–33.

28 Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p. 30. See also p. xii–xiii: 'They [emotions] emerge as a combination of the physical properties of your body, a flexible brain that wires itself to whatever environment it develops in, and your culture and upbringing, which provide that environment. Emotions are real, but not in the objective sense that

cific to the modern Western world and its classical legacy.[29] It is here that traces of Enlightenment idealism and the middle-class ideology of sincerity located only on the inside prove especially persistent. Taking into account the performative nature and inherent regime of sources for emotional expression (autobiographies, diaries, interviews, etc.) is indeed necessary, but this should not be confused with distinguishing between 'real' and 'mediated' emotion or trying to divest the subjective of the performative. Emotion, as most historians understand it, encompasses the entire sequence from perception to expression.[30]

Practice theory has proven a helpful tool for linking historical research with the findings that emotions, as Feldman Barrett writes, 'are not reactions to the world' but meaning actively constructed by a brain.[31] Emotions are here understood as something that people do, or 'a kind of practice,' as anthropologist Monique Scheer has theorized. Similar to researchers before her, Scheer aims at bringing together the natural sciences with historical studies by reconsidering what counts as an emotion and understanding the body as critical for this undertaking: 'an emotion without a medium for experience cannot be described as one.'[32] On the one hand, she wants to do away for good with the division between internal emotions and externalized expressions, with neuroscientists covering the first and humanities scholars the latter. On the other, she foregrounds the dynamic and relational nature of emotions, which are understood as coming into being for a reason.

---

molecules or neurons are real. They are real in the same sense that money is real – that is, hardly an illusion, but a product of human agreement.'

29 See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 111–207.

30 See Richard Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9, who defines emotions as 'package deals,' ranging from presentations of a phenomenon through evaluation to response, and Margrit Pernau, 'Mapping Emotions, Constructing Feelings. Delhi in 1840s,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58 (2015): p. 635: 'the creation of a feeling and its expression will be conceived as taking place in a single movement, through a variety of media and through practices. Expressions do not represent an already existing emotion but are constitutive of its creation. This allows us to overcome not only the division between the inner and the outer but also the methodological individualism that posits an ontological and temporal primordiality of a self-contained subject and that only in a second step makes contact with the world around him or her.'

31 Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made*, p. 31.

32 Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012): p. 209.

Scheer's notion of emotions as practice is inspired by a number of differing philosophical and psychological theories. These include the work of philosophers Robert C. Salomon and Alva Noë, who have both posited that emotions are something that are done; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and externalization of experience; and findings from cognitive psychology, such as 'situated cognition' and the Extended Mind Theory (EMT), which understand experience and activity as inseparable.[33] In particular, however, Scheer draws on Pierre Bourdieu's practice and habitus theories and William Reddy's conceptualization of emotions, which combined psychology, anthropology, and history. Emotions, Reddy wrote, are 'largely (but not entirely) [...] learned'; there is cultural variation, but there is also 'a core concept of emotions, universally applicable.'[34] Without proposing a proper theory, Reddy uses the term 'emotional practices' loosely, as opposed to 'emotion lexicons' and 'conceptions of emotions.'[35] Activity and emotion, Scheer emphasizes, should not be thought of as separate. Emotional practices are not merely 'things that people do that are accompanied by emotion,' but also 'things people do *in order to* have emotions' or, in a performative sense, acts themselves.[36]

'Practice' effectively encompasses all action, intentional and goal-oriented behaviour as much as habituated or unintentional acts; it includes patterns of conduct and one-off deeds, verbal and non-verbal expressions, and postures and attitudes. 'From this point of view, automatic behavior, reflexes, spontaneous responses – categories to which emotions have traditionally belonged – are not "purely biological" or free of culture [...]. They are more fruitfully thought of as habits emerging where bodily capacities and cultural requirements meet.'[37] By understanding emotions as being constituted through practice, divisions between body and mind, inner and outer feeling, or nature and nurture are cleared away. The body, she writes, 'is actor and instrument.' It is a 'knowing body, one that stores information from past experiences in habituated processes.' Even the difference between history and the present becomes blurred: the body is also a historical body, consisting 'not only of the sedimentations of evolutionary time, but also the history of the society in which the

33 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 196–197. See also p. 197: 'The socially and environmentally contextualized body thinks along with the brain.'

34 Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. x, xi.

35 Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, esp. p. 34.

36 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 194.

37 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 201–202.

organism is embedded.'[38] This includes biological modifications, as particular corporal behavior engenders a particular physiology.[39]

Emotions come into being through body, mind, and situation, with the historic trajectories of each infusing them with historicity and direction. A 'distinction between incorporated society and parts of the body generating emotion is hard to make,' she writes. 'The physiological contains both the organic and the social, which cooperate in the production of emotion.'[40] In contrast to Feldman Barrett's brain-centred constructionist concept on the one hand and the cultural historian's interest, exemplified by Matt, in emotion expression as layered on a biological basis on the other, Scheer understands emotion expression *as* emotion. In thus sidestepping the tacit distinction between emotion and expression, she also circumnavigates the epistemological impasse of historians not being able to investigate 'actual' emotions because they cannot investigate the brain.

Bourdieu's habitus theory, while not specifically addressing emotions, provides a model for thinking about them, although Scheer cautions against the use of 'emotional habitus' because she finds it to make the concept too particular.[41] Rather, emotions are part of the habitus: as it incorporates social structure, infusing the bodies with ideas of what is possible and impossible or allowed and forbidden in a particular society, the habitus includes rules both for expressing emotions and for validating them. Arlie Russell Hochschild's now canonical *The Managed Heart* (1983) has demonstrated how the rules for showing emotions can seep into experience and become internalized. Feelings, such as 'hold[ing] a grudge beyond the grave,' are deemed 'misfitting' by those who hold them, even if they are completely unbeknown to others.[42]

4 The Social and the Subjective, the Individual and 'the Times'

Scheer's take on emotional practices through the Bourdieuian lens refocused attention on the individual incorporation of social structure. While all people

38 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 200–201.

39 'Habitual postures and movements build up muscle tissue, innervation and blood vessels in one area and not another, shorten some tendons, lengthen others, affect bone density and shape, and induce specific development of brain tissue.' Scheer, 'Practice', p. 202.

40 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 207.

41 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 194. For the use of 'emotional habitus' see for instance Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent. Expression and Control in Victorian Discourse on Emotions, 1830–1872* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), p. 3.

42 Hochschild, *Managed Heart*, p. 65.

are, as Bettina Hitzer has recently written, united, if not by universal feelings, then by the universal ability to feel, the specific modes of feeling and expressing them have to be learned through a socially embedded mindful body.[43] Both William Reddy's and Monique Scheer's approaches were geared towards forgoing the dichotomy between social and subjective altogether, because both cannot be delineated in a satisfactory manner without taking into account the other's influence.[44] This is one reason for the history of emotion's penchant for micro-history, which is concerned with better understanding the macro-structure by focusing on both the typical and the exceptional on a micro-level. Locating the social within the individual, while staying attuned to how the subjective experience shapes structure, is at the heart of biographical research and the history of emotions.

To grasp the patterns for enacting, shaping, teaching, learning, and guiding emotions and their expression, display, and performance, scholars work with concepts such as 'emotional style' or 'script'.[45] The script in particular deserves a quick side glance.[46] In the context of biographical research and in particular of biography writing, the script, a term often used both in affect

43 Bettina Hitzer, *Krebs fühlen. Eine Emotionsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2020), p. 13.

44 Especially in emotion research critical of capitalism and neo-liberalism, there is a – politically coloured – tendency to see the individual as either completely repressed or even obliterated by market forces and governance or in resistance to the economic logic that permeates even the most intimate of settings. See especially Hochschild, *Managed Heart*; Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies. The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Malden: Polity, 2013); Illouz, *Warum Liebe endet. Eine Soziologie negativer Beziehungen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018). Reddy discusses the 'emotional refuge', which is a 'relationship, ritual, or organization (whether informal or formal) that provides safe release from prevailing emotional norms and allows relaxation of emotional effort.' Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. 129.

45 On styles see William Reddy, 'Emotional Styles and Modern Forms of Life', in *Sexualized Brains. Scientific Modeling of Emotional Intelligence from a Cultural Perspective*, eds. Nicole C. Karafyllis and Gotlind Ulshöfer (Cambridge/London: Bradford Book, The MIT Press, 2008), p. 81–100; Gammerl, 'Emotional Styles', p. 161–75.

46 See Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint*, p. 8: 'The emotion properly understood [...] is the whole process and all its constituent elements, the little narrative or dramatic script that is acted out from the evaluative perception at its beginnings to the various possible responses at the end.' On 'script' in affect theory see Silvan Tomkins, 'Script Theory. Differential Magnification of Affects', in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, eds. H.E. Howe and R.A. Dienstbier (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 217: 'In my script theory, the scene, a happening with a perceived beginning and end, is the basic unit of analysis. The whole connected set of scenes lived in sequence is called the plot of a life. The script, in contrast, does not deal with all the scenes or the *plot* of a life, but rather with the individual's rules for predicting, interpreting, responding to, and controlling a magnified set of scenes.' Cf. 'Glossary for Tomkins' Affect, Script, and Human Being Theories' in Duncan

theory and the history of emotions to denote a programme or plan people follow (unconsciously) to manage, express, or deal with emotions in a given situation, takes on a doubly different meaning. Auto-/Biographical narratives, be they written or oral, do not only describe, but plot, transform, and construct emotions. Biographical research, especially of the historical bent, makes use of written biographies and autobiographies, both of which organize the data of life into a coherent narrative along the lines of temporal structuration, and offer causal connections.[47] Scripts and plots tell us something about the individual's place in a larger context, about their reasons for responding to scenarios in a certain way, about relationships, and about their dealings with the habitual and the exceptional in their lives. Biography as a genre is, just like biographical research, intimately concerned with how the individual navigates and is shaped by their social environment, which is embedded in the sequencing of the plot. It thereby attempts to reconstruct emotional scripts, while also, necessarily, producing them. Biographical narratives make sense of emotions, for oneself and for others, by way of a meaningful composition; emotions may even be their organizing principle and reason for composing a *Life* in the first place.[48] But auto-/biographical narratives, especially in the wider sense of oral narratives as part of everyday communication, are also devices of making emotions: they interpret, clarify, reinforce, or help to overcome emotions through accompanying or retrospective description.[49]

A. Lucas, *Affect Theory, Genre, and the Example of Tragedy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 239–314. On affect theory see Ruth Leys, 'Turn to Affect. A Critique', *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011): p. 434–472. See also Silvan Tomkins, 'Inverse Archaeology: Facial Affect and the Interfaces of Scripts Within and Between Persons', in *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*, ed. Virginia Demos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 289, where he wrote that scripts are 'minitheories that each of us has to generate in order to deal with the regularities and the changes in the world as we live in it.'

47 See Karin Kukkonen, 'Plot', in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University): http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/plot (accessed 26 January 2021).

48 Nigel Hamilton, *How to Do Biography. A Primer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 183: 'The fact is that, if you are to be a serious biographer, affection, desire, love, distaste, hatred, and sex must feature at the center of your work, in tandem with the events that punctuate the life. […] Tracing the course of love […] is at the heart of almost all serious biographical storytelling'.

49 Tilmann Habermas, *Emotion and Narrative. Perspectives in Autobiographical Storytelling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 11: 'the readers'/listeners' emotions are influenced by which perspectives narratives offer and which they do not offer. […] Narrating emotional experiences may help the narrator to master the narrated situation and its emotional impact.'

The interlacing of the individual and the macro-structure in which they move also plagued Stanfield. As he wrote, institutions, laws, religion, as well as 'notions, prejudices, fashions, humours, peculiar pursuits, and general condition,' engender 'a spirit and character of a nation.' In contrast, chance, education, or personal circumstances (all again infused with the institutional setting) 'produce in the same individuals that diversity of ideas and sentiments, to which we give the name of *particular spirit and character*.'[50] While Stanfield believed in the Anglo-cultural idea of great men, rather than events, making history, his questions of how structure shapes the individual qualify this emphasis. He also implicitly posed a question that, even nowadays, gains repeated currency, especially in the public realm: is there a dominant mentality of people or times and if so, how can one grasp it? Berating biographers for not abstracting from their own background when approaching people living in other spaces and times, Stanfield notes that authors must never lose sight of 'that biographical information, which can only be attained by contemplating the identical character, as it was necessarily formed and actuated, according to the absolute condition of the person and the prevailing spirit of the existing times.'[51] How does the 'prevailing spirit' relate to emotions? Books like Peter Stearns's *American Cool* (1994), Frank Biess's *German Angst* (2015), and the multitude of studies on the 'Age of Sensibility' put forward the notion that different societies and periods have a reigning feeling, a sort of emotional *zeitgeist*, or at least a prevailing style.[52] The criticism of such broadly conceived histories of mentality notwithstanding, they draw attention to the fact that emotions are inter- as well as supra-personal in that their expression is informed by collective thoughts and attitudes.[53]

---

50 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 283, 284.

51 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 286.

52 Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool. Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), p. 1: 'Cool. The concept is distinctly American, and it permeates almost every aspect of contemporary American culture.' Frank Biess, *German Angst. Fear and Democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 1: 'The history of the Federal Republic is also a history of the republic's fears.' Ironically, Northrop Frye, who coined the term 'age of sensibility', was well aware that it did not describe a monolithic emotional fashion of the second half of the eighteenth century, but was 'anything but a label.' Northrop Frye, 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility', *ELH* 23(1956)2: p. 144.

53 See Peter Burke, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the History of Mentalities', *History of European Ideas* 7(1986) 5: p. 439–451.

5 Sources for Emotions

Feelings, Monique Scheer insists, are relational. They do not exist for their own sake, but with a view to something. Researching feelings needs to take into account context as constitutive to emotions: 'Access to emotion-as-practice [...] in historical sources and ethnographic work is achieved through and in connection with other doings and sayings on which emotion-as-practice is dependent and intertwined, such as speaking, gesturing, remembering, manipulating objects, and perceiving sounds, smells, and spaces.'[54] Scheer chooses four categories to show how emotions-as-practices come into being: first, practices that mobilize emotions, such as rituals (courtships, Christian penance rites) or everyday pastimes (use of media); second, naming and using emotives (Reddy's self-altering 'first-person, present tense emotion claims' such as 'I am sad');[55] third, practices of communication (coaches shouting to their teams indicate they are angry); and fourth, learning and the management of emotions.[56] Although the division is somewhat muddled – is using an emotive not a form of communication? – it draws attention to the fact that the preeminent playing field of historians, i.e., giving context, reconstructing relations, and tracing coherence, is essential to understanding emotions – not because it situates the emotion, but because context is actually part of the emotion's make-up. However, even if emotion-as-practice is a valuable understanding of emotions, it still leaves historians with the difficulty that they also need to take into account the specific source's character. As there are disparities between what has happened (an emotion and its manifestation in a historical person) and what has found its way into a source – and this dichotomy is much less easier dispensed with than the others outlined above – enquiries into what emotions are and do entail questions of what qualifies as historical evidence.[57]

54 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 209.

55 See Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, p. 99–100.

56 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 209–217.

57 See Barclay, Crozier-De Rosa and Stearns, eds., *Sources for the History of Emotions*, especially the introduction; Plamper, *History of Emotions*, p. 33–39; Susan J. Matt, 'Recovering the Invisible. Methods for the Historical Study of the Emotions', in *Doing Emotions History*, eds. Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), p. 41–53; as well as the Max Planck Institute for Human Development's Center for the History of Emotions web portal *History of Emotions. Insights into Research*, a platform dedicated to showing how the history of emotion is done: https://www.history-of-emotions.mpg.de/en.

It seems apparent, then, as Stanfield wrote, 'that the philosophy of character must be founded on actual observations, – directed precisely to facts – those especially of personal condition, manners, tendencies, and sentiments.'[58] Biographical research interested in feelings traces the emotions connected to the habitual and the exceptional in a subject's everyday life, but what can be done if sociological research is not possible because the person under investigation is long deceased? As the ontological status of emotion is contested, historians engaging in emotion research have often veered towards a pragmatic approach. Emotions are, as Joanna Bourke has succinctly put it, 'what people say they are feeling.'[59] In Scheer's view, emotions are entirely instrumental: 'understanding emotions as practices also means taking into account the practical uses of emotions in social settings […]. If there is no relational reason to communicate or enact or guard against an emotion, then it should be considered absent.'[60] Although it is useful for researchers to assume an emotion is absent if no sign or expression of it can be found, defining emotions from the vantage point of the researcher rather than the researched opens another can of worms: what is the threshold for the registering of an emotion sign? If a sign equates to an emotion, when does the absence of a sign equate to the absence of particular feelings, and when does it equate to the absence of feeling in general? Therefore, it would be less controversial to state that the absence of a communicative device does not indicate the absence of emotion, but the absence of *researchable* emotion.

As James Stanfield's text shows, this concern is not new. Stanfield compiled extensive lists of the sources a biographer should consult and put forward arguments for their respective usefulness. Many of them, such as letters and testaments, would nowadays be classified as ego-documents, but he also valued anecdotes, written by others, and, verging on proto-oral history, recordings of speeches and conversations.[61] Stanfield was well aware that in order to enquire into 'character,' it had to become somehow observable; in order to explore emotions, there need to be reflections of them. This has led to historians relying, for better or worse, mostly on writing. Even Scheer has conceded: 'Texts will remain the main sources, not only for discourses and implicit orders of knowledge, but also for emotives and other emotional practices.'[62] Ego-documents, in particular diaries, letters, and autobiograph-

58 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 281.

59 Joanna Bourke, 'Foreword', in *Total War. An Emotional History*, ed. Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes and Claudia Siebrecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. ix.

60 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 219.

61 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 174–187.

62 Scheer, 'Practice', p. 218.

ies, figure prominently as testimonies to emotional experience, while conduct books, fictional books, institutional rituals, or news coverage provide insights into feeling rules, regimes, and standards for expressing emotions. Peter and Carol Stearns have called those standards 'emotionology,' and have posited that every enquiry into emotion 'should begin with the emotionological context.'[63] Sometimes, this is all researchers can lay hands on, but even if there are more private sources available, they are most likely filtered through expectations about emotion expression, such as decorum or the rules of the genre. There are, in addition, a multitude of non-verbal sources, such as images, sounds, movies, symbols, objects, exhibitions, advertisements, seating plans, military maps, to name but a few – although, one could argue, their conceptualization and interpretation ('the orders of knowledge') remain fundamentally logocentric. Finding a way to do justice to the specificity of the various sources, the rationale for their production, and their inherent display regime remains a challenge, yet is essential to investigating how emotions manifest. Due to the problem of tracing experience on the basis of mediations such as text or images, there have been concerns about the value of a history of emotions that amounts sometimes to little more than a text or picture analysis.[64] Such awareness is all the more advisable since many genres processing life data, such as biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, auto-/biofiction, self-/portraiture, and forms of automediality, such as blogs, vlogs, or the graphic memoir, have a strong claim to artistic value. Biographical research can also mean life-writing studies. While all genres have formal rules of representation, utilizing works that are also, in one way or another, works of art means further staying attuned to how aesthetics negotiate information.[65]

6 Conclusion: How to Find the Emotional Self?

The history of emotions brings together strands of research that are as diverse as social history, the history of ideas, the history of the body, literary and art history, and historical anthropology – and it is best served if it uses whatever makes researchers both provide new views on old sources and unlock new ones. The self, some argue, is always there, even if it is not at the forefront:

63 Stearns, 'Emotionology', p. 825.

64 Schnell, *Histories of Emotions*, p. 31–40.

65 See Kate Retford, 'Philippe Ariès's "Discovery of Childhood": Imagery and Historical Evidence', *Continuity and Change* 31(2016)3: p. 391–418, for a thorough investigation of how to use pictures as evidence beyond their subject.

by treating their subject in a particular way, a biography is also a form of self-life-writing of its author. A translation can reveal the views and thoughts of its maker through choices of words and themes. Collections of books, paintings, porcelain, or merchandising products indicate values, interests, and social standing, all of them emotionally charged. The saying that 'every artist paints himself' has been around at least since the Renaissance.[66] Mining the autobiographical elements of, potentially, any workings, sayings, or doings without falling prey to psycho-historic conjectures is a major challenge. If we were to believe James Stanfield, then it is the biographer's emotion – understood as a mixture of sentiment and inner movement – that makes them choose their subject and turn it into an engaging work. On two commendable authors, he wrote: 'Both excited by an enthusiastic apprehension of their object; – and each communicating his emotion in the full glow of biographic spirit.'[67] The biographer had to have an 'acute sensibility to the workings of different passions, and the plastic power of transmitting the emotion effectually to the conception of a kindred observer.'[68] Feelings, Stanfield implied, were best uncovered by feeling, which results, of course, in a circular argument: emotions become the precondition for researching them. The aim of biographical research concerned with emotions is both humbler and more ambitious. While it does not request a particular emotional mindset, it nevertheless encourages researchers to dare foreground a category that is so complex its definition is still not agreed upon, yet so powerful that it relates to every person (and maybe even to non-human animals) on the planet.

Acknowledgment

I thank Karsten Lichau for his very helpful comments on the manuscript.

66 Colin Eisler, '"Every Artist Paints Himself:" Art History as Biography and Autobiography', *Social Research* 54 (1987)1: p. 73–99.

67 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 131.

68 Stanfield, *Essay*, p. 130.

The Great Individual in History: Historicising Historian's Biographical Practice

Melanie Nolan

Robert A. Caro has twice won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography and many other awards, including the United States of America's National Book Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2016. The London *Economist* recently described him as America's biographer-in-chief but he has an international reputation with the London *Sunday Times* deeming Caro to be 'the greatest political biographer of our times'.[1] He published the story of Robert Moses, the master builder of the New York metropolitan area, although Caro's best-known work is his multi-volume of Lyndon Johnson, the 36th President of the USA. He is currently working on the fifth and final Johnson volume.[2] His work is described as biography yet Caro maintains it is political history about power-broking and social master-building:

> People are always asking me why I chose Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson to write about. Well, I must say I never thought of my books as the stories of Moses or Johnson. I never had the slightest interest in writing the life of a great man. From the very start I thought of writing biographies as a means of illuminating the times of the men I was writing about and the great forces that molded those times – particularly the force that is political power.[3]

In his recent reflection on his practice, *Working* (2019), Caro comes as close as he has ever come to discussing his theoretical approach. Indeed, I argue he is displaying a central trait in biographical practice more generally; he epitomises the reluctance historians have with explicit discussion of biographical theory and debate. Here, I focus on two related issues: first, historians'

1 *The Economist*, London 431(2019)9138, p. 80.

2 Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker. Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974); and *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982–2012): vol. 1, *The Path to Power* (1982); vol. 2, *Means of Ascent* (1990); vol. 3, *Master of the Senate* (2002); and vol. 4, *The Passage of Power* (2012).

3 Robert A. Caro, *Working. Researching, Interviewing, Writing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), p. 3.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_007

debates over the balance of life or times and the relationship between agency or structure when writing biography; and second historicising the patterns in the debates over time.

Most of Caro's readers appreciate his work for the story or biography of Moses and Johnson presented, not for any historiographical or theoretical insights. In this Caro is typical of best-selling historians in that he wears his theory and the historiography 'lightly on his sleeve'. Leon Edel once suggested that biographers should adopt psychoanalytical theory when researching lives but should remove those abstractions when writing up their narratives and analyses.[4] Caro goes further to claim not even to be subconsciously guided by a theoretical position at all. His biographical practice is meticulous research and scholarship. This view is widespread among historians: Donald M. MacRaild and Avram Taylor conclude that, in terms of the debate over structure and agency, that '[a]lthough historians are equally concerned with the relationship between social structure and human agency, they do not always discuss it in such explicit terms'.[5] Despite this avoidance of direct discussion, MacRaild and Taylor suggest there is a consensus in the historiography involving agreement on the issue: an 'empiricist', 'commonsense' or traditional' approach, which emphasises the role of the individual rather than concentrating upon the structures constraining agency. As Christopher Lloyd says, 'Concepts of society as an independent structure with causal power play no part in their work but they do usually have a vaguely holistic concept of the Zeitgeist or character of an epoch', or spirit of the age.[6] They set out to contextualise the subject, however, not vice versa. Historicising the debate is a good way to establish what is the 'traditional' approach.

Indeed, increasingly, historians' biographical practices are being historicised, that is examining over time the contingent and changing social and intellectual climate in which their works were produced. Gradually, biographers are being put in their historical place in typologies. There has been a wave of biographies on historians and a more general analysis of schools of his-

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

5 Donald M. MacRaild and Avram Taylor, 'Social Structure and Human Agency in Historical Explanation', in *Social Theory and Social History* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 80–117.

6 Christopher Lloyd, *The Structures of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 78.

torical biography.[7] There has also been a wave of excellent historiographical surveys of their ideas and practices, including most recently those by Nigel Hamilton and Hermione Lee.[8] These survey analyses usually examine a series of popular, dominant or innovative approaches to biography chronologically. A number of publications about biographical theory have also recently appeared, foremost about them on the late 20th century 'biographical turn' by Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma.[9] Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders have reprinted key texts about biography in theory, starting systematically from the 18th century with Samuel Johnson and Johann Gottfried Herder, reproducing extracts of classic texts together with presentist critical commentaries.[10] They argue that, taking the longer view, critical discussions about biography are not a new phenomenon but 'our current understandings are the product of a longer tradition of biographical debate'.[11] I take another tack here by considering one thread in more detail. How have historians thought about the balance of life or times in biography? Has there been, in the main, a consensus? What is the nature of historians' debates over structure and agency in biography?

Historicising a debate over time allows us to tease out the extent to which the issues have evolved. It also helps us correct the sharpness entailed in the idea of a biographical turn that often also entails the suggestion that historians abandoned the study of biography at some point in the twentieth century. Sabina Loriga argued that from the early nineteenth century, 'historians put the actions and suffering of individuals on one side to try to discover the invis-

7 Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jaume Aurell, *Authoring the Past: History, Autobiography and Politics in Medieval Catalonia* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2012); Jaume Aurell, *Theoretical perspectives on historians' autobiographies: from documentation to intervention* (London: Routledge, 2016).

8 Nigel Hamilton, *Biography. A Brief history* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Earlier surveys in English include Waldo H. Dunn, *English Biography* (London: Dent, 1916) and Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927).

9 Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, *Theoretical discussions of biography: approaches from history, microhistory, and life writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (London: Routledge, 2017).

10 Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (eds.), *Biography in theory. Key Texts with Commentaries* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* (1750); and *The Idler* (1759); Johann Gottfried Herder, *Fifth Letter on the Furtherance of Humanity* (1793).

11 Hemecker and Saunders, *Biography in theory*, p. 7–8.

ible process of universal history', 'that evolutionary movement of our genre, which should be considered as its true content, as its centre and its essence".[12]

While this was attempted, several vigorous defences of biography were made over the same period. Loriga focuses on the case against writing biography if you will, from an interdisciplinary perspective, as if historians capitulated to the censure of those, like the modernists, especially Bloomsbury writers such as Harold Nicolson and Lytton Strachey, who loathed historians' biographies, their 'sullen cloud', their 'globs' of 'fat volumes … of undigested' material which were badly written.[13] As Loriga observes elsewhere, the 'border separating history and biography has always been uncertain and anything but peaceful'.[14] She is interested in the moments when the contested relationship between history and biography was sharpest: 'The first dates to the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries and is especially linked to the impact and success of philosophical history.'[15]

Philosophers like Immanuel Kant and sociologists led by Herbert Spencer took up the cudgels against writing biographies of great individuals in history. Following them, 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.[16]

During the twentieth century, Annales School and cliometricians 'further damaged … the image of biographical history'.[17] Loriga argued, then, that the period from the late eighteenth century until the late twentieth century biographical turn there was a scholarly push for the 'annihilation of the individual'.[18]

Caro's denial that he ever 'had the slightest interest in writing the life of a great man' is an implicit criticism of Thomas Carlyle who instigated the first great defence over historians' biographical practices. When Caro defends biography as a means to illuminating the times of his biographical subjects, he is also contributing to the long-running debate that has been waged since

12 Sabina Loriga, 'The role of the individual in history: Biographical and historical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century', in Renders and De Haan, *Theoretical discussions of biography*, p. 75. The quote is from William Dilthey (1910).

13 Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* p. 110. Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1918); Lytton Strachey, *Biographical essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948).

14 Loriga, 'The role of the individual in history', p. 76.

15 Loriga, 'The role of the individual in history', p. 79–80.

16 Loriga, 'The role of the individual in history', p. 79–80.

17 Loriga, 'The role of the individual in history', p. 86–87.

18 Loriga, 'The role of the individual in history', p. 79.

the nineteenth century over the balance between a life and times, and the methodologies historians should employ to establish credible accounts. Caro is interested in studies in power. There was a very general 'consensus in the historiography', as MacRaild and Taylor have suggested, with historians rarely choosing between writing a life or writing about a subject's collective times but we should not overlook a series of 'internal debates' over the issues. Historians' disagreements have been over the degree to which to contextualise a life and there have been significant debates over this from Carlyle to Caro, with historians writing biography furiously between 1840 and now.

1 The Victorian Debate over the Great Individual in History and Interactionalism

Carlyle began a debate which spanned the Victorian era and scholarly developments including Romanticism, sociology and Marxism, at the time that history was professionalizing as a discipline. Romanticism was an 18th to 19th century response to the Enlightenment which celebrated individualism, naturalism and idealism. Amigoni has argued that critics have 'tended to place Carlyle in a narrative in which he figures as a residual man of letters who produced 'artistic' historiography which came to be denigrated by a later generation of 'scientific' professionals'.[19] Be that as it may, in the 1820s and 1830s, Carlyle's mission was to establish biography as historians' major approach in the face of the biographical scepticism of scientists.[20]

Carlyle is forever associated with the great man thesis of the solitary and superior person after he gave a series of six lectures in 1840 which were published the following year as *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*.[21] He set out to historicise hero worship in six phases from ancient times to the nineteenth century: the hero as divinity, examining Odin, Paganism and Scandinavian mythology; the hero as prophet, examining Mahomet

19 David Amigoni, *Victorian biography: intellectuals and the ordering of discourse* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

20 See Thomas Carlyle, 'Biography', in: *Fraser's Magazine* 59(1832)27, p. 253–260; Thomas Carlyle, 'Boswell's life of Johnson', *Fraser's Magazine* vol. 5(1832)28, p. 379–413, in R.W. Emerson (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle: Modern British Essayists*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Hart, Carey & Hart, 1852), https://ia800207.us.archive.org/9/items/criticalmiscella00incarl/criticalmiscella00incarl.pdf accessed 29 January 2020.

21 Thomas Carlyle, 'Lecture 1: The Hero as Divine [1840]' in: Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Project Gutenberg, November 1997), www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext97/heros10.txt, accessed 4 November 2019.

and Islam; the hero as poet, examining Dante and William Shakespeare, the hero as priest, examining Martin Luther and John Knox, the hero as a man of letters, examining Samuel Johnson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Robert Burns, and the hero as king, examining Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon.[22] Carlyle argued that Hero-worship had changed in each age but great men in history had been the 'living light fountain' which had 'enlightened the darkness in the world', and were responsible for significant changes to the world.[23] Great men were indispensable saviours of epochs 'the lighting, without which the fuel never would have burnt'.[24] Carlyle chose his examples of heroes strategically: they were largely dead white men (Mahomet notwithstanding); while one of Carlyle's personal heroes was not included because he did not think his British reading public were sufficiently familiar with Johann von Goethe's work.[25] Carlyle's biographical *magnum opus*, however, published in 1858, was his 21 volume biography of Frederick the Great's *Twelve Hercules-labors of this King* which accomplished 'what was required of him in World-History'.[26]

Carlyle was interested in the spark of individual genius and also the circumstances in which they prevailed. Why was it that some people managed to accomplish so much? He argued: The history of the world is but the biography of great men. Nothing stops the man who desires to achieve. Every obstacle is simply a course to develop his achievement muscle. It's a strengthening of his powers of accomplishment. No sadder proof can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in great men.'[27]

Carlyle wanted to capture what made a genius conspicuous, and secondly he wanted his contemporaries to respect heroes, past and present. He suggested that social life was not only the aggregate of all the individual great men's lives who constitute society, but that biographies of non-entities were worth writing too. For instance, he wrote about his friend John Sterling.[28] In his article on *Biography* Carlyle opined that the man who first took an army over the Alps is not more momentous to us than 'the nameless boor who first

22 Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*.

23 David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser (eds.), *Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (University of California Press, 1993), p. 21.

24 Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*, p. 15–17.

25 Carlyle hardly discusses women. A rare exception, 'Poor ill-advised Marie-Antoinette; with a woman's vehemence, not with a sovereign's foresight!'

26 Thomas Carlyle, *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called 'Frederick the Great'*, 21 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–73): Project Gutenberg, https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=1091, accessed 26 January 2020.

27 Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*.

28 Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Stirling* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1851).

hammered out an iron spade. When the oak-tree is felled, the whole forest echoes with it; but a hundred acorns are planted silently by some unnoticed breeze.'[29]

In this and in so many ways Carlyle was a product of German Idealism and Romanticism.[30] He never met its leading lights, Friedrich Schiller or Goethe. He delighted in Goethe's *Faust*, corresponded with him and was invited to Germany to visit him.[31] Somehow Carlyle never managed to travel to Weimar or Jena in Germany where a remarkable intellectual circle had developed around Goethe, Alexander von Humboldt, Johann von Humboldt, and Schiller.[32] Like Humboldt, Carlyle was a former 'Prince of Empiricism'. Carlyle never took out a degree but he first studied divinity and moral philosophy and classics from 1809 at the University of Edinburgh. He abandoned theology to excel in mathematics: the 'Carlyle circle' is a quadratic equation in geometry named for him.[33] Carlyle became a mathematical tutor for some years, first at Annan Academy and then privately before turning to literature and history. He rejected orthodox Christianity but not heroarchy (his term for admiration of heroes) and wonder. Carlyle immersed himself in the German romantics, publishing a *Life of Schiller*, serially in the *London Magazine* (1823–1824) as a monograph in 1825. In 1834 he translated Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship* into English.[34]

In the process, Carlyle came to adopt many of same responses Goethe had developed to the rational methods of Enlightenment thinkers. Like Schiller and Goethe, Carlyle came to believe that imagination and reason were both necessary to innovation.[35] As a mathematician turned historian trying to capture the emotional reactions to historical events, Carlyle maintained that empirical investigation and scientific methods were compatible with subjectivity.[36] He was unembarrassed by writing biography and history lyrically.[37]

---

29 Thomas Carlyle, 'On History', in: Carlyle, *Historical Essays*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 6.

30 Charles Frederick Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought, 1819–34* (New Haven and London: Archon Books, 1934).

31 Loriga, 'The Role of the Individual in History', p. 75.

32 Andrea Wulf, *The invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's new world* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), p. 25–38.

33 E. John Hornby, Jr, 'Geometrical and Graphical Solutions of Quadratic Equations', *The College Mathematics Journal* 21(1990)5, p. 362–369.

34 Donald Stone, 'Goethe and the Victorians', *Carlyle Annual* 13(1992–1993), p. 17–34.

35 Carlyle, *On Biography*.

36 Andrea Wulf, *The invention of Nature*, p. 143.

37 John Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle* (London and New York: Hambledon-Continuum, 2006), p. 162 and 166.

He experimented with literature, just as Goethe had done with his autobiographical novel *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* (1774) and Schiller with his play, *The Robbers* (1781). Carlyle's own *Sartor Resartus* (1836) was an experimental novel about an editor reviewing a fictional book about the changing philosophy of clothes by a fictional philosopher, described as 'factual and fictional, serious and satirical, speculative and historical'.[38] It contains much advice about how to write biography. Carlyle first presented those ideas on 'science and the poetic', 'the natural and magical', 'faction and reality' in his 1830 article 'On biography'.

Carlyle believed the prose was as important as the content in biography with a study of heroes being crucial for they influenced whole epochs of people's imaginations. He believed in a 'group mind' and the concept of Zeitgeist, or the spirit or mood that defined a particular period of history and that could be accessed by considering contemporary ideas and beliefs and heroes. Heroes expressed contemporary ideas: 'The thoughts they had were the parents of the actions they did; their feelings were parents of their thoughts: it was the unseen and spiritual in them that determined the outward and actual.'[39] Carlyle believed that the romantic movement underestimated heroes and obstructed hero worship. His contemporaries were in the throes of 'an Age of Skepticism' whereby they sought to explain the world and history scientifically and with that came a loss of mystery, a 'disbelief in nature' and great men which had caused a spiritual paralysis.[40] He implored the British reading public in *Sartor Resartus* to 'close thy Byron, open thy Goethe' who was the 'physician of the Iron Age'.[41] Nonetheless, Carlyle and Goethe diverged on some issues.[42]

There have been a range of kinds of criticisms of Carlyle over the years which are not mutually exclusive.[43] As Atkinson noted, 'the Victorian Age has

38 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1836 f.p. as a serial in *Fraser's magazine* November 1833–1834); quote from publisher's description.

39 Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*, p. 16.

40 Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* Lecture 2.

41 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*.

42 Gregory Maertz, 'Carlyle's Critique of Goethe: Literature and the Cult of Personality', *Studies in Scottish Literature* vol. 29, (1996), p. 205–226. David R. Sorensen, 'Selective Affinities: Carlyle, Goethe and the French Revolution', in: *Carlyle Studies Annual* 16(1996), p. 61–71.

43 Jules Paul Seigel (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle. The Critical Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1971). Philip Rosenberg, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 191–193. D.J. Treia and Rodger L. Tarr, *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).

become so closely associated with hero-workshop that it is easy to forget the vigorous opposition with which Carlyle's ideas were received by so many'.[44]

Later critics not only note a liberal and illiberal tension in Carlyle's heroes, comparing them to Friedrich Nietzsche's 'amoral superman' but also a slippery slope to fascism and Nazism.[45] Modernists, from Bloomsbury on, delighted in revealing the flaws of 'heroes', living, as they did, in times dominated by complex, flawed leaders and, often, anti-heroes, It is one thing to think heroes were flawed or evil; another to think that they did not really matter overall to the course of this, and this second issue – which sociologists like Herbert Spencer championed – was crucial for historians.[46]

In turn, William James in his 1880 lecture to the Harvard Natural History Society on 'Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment', published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in October 1880, took aim at Spencer's ideas and, in the process, gave some support to Carlyle's main argument. James argued that individual geniuses were critical as 'ferments, initiators of movements, setters of precedent or fashion, centres of corruption, or destroyers of other persons, whose gifts, had they had free play, would have led society in another direction'.[47] However, James made a case for individual initiative based on social evolution or spontaneous variations of genius. James was interested above all in the relationship between different environments and their propensity to produce great minds. Rather than Carlyle's great men cultivating their own raw ability and spiritual worth, James emphasised the need to understand the relationship or 'interactionism' between individuals and their environment to understand how individuals and environments mutually determined each other. Without conditions and opportunities that both required and fostered minds, a genius' potential is never realised.[48] On one reading Spencer seems to say more or less the same thing in terms of the society making an individual.

James went further, however in suggesting that physiology from conception to the 'invisible and imaginable play of forces of growth within the nervous system' meant individuals developed independently of society. Variations of

---

44 Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered. A Story of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 53–54.

45 Eric Russell Bentley, 'Modern Hero-Worship: Notes on Carlyle, Nietzsche, and Stefan George', *The Sewanee Review* 52(1944)3, p. 441–456.

46 Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912, f.p. 1873).

47 William James, 'Great men and their environment', *Atlantic Monthly*, no. 46 (October 1880), p. 227.

48 Stephen S. Bush, *William James on Democratic Individuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

genius, or greatness, occurred spontaneously in biology. Significantly individual initiative meant that individuals influenced their environments which in turn 'preserve[d] or destroy[ed] the newly encountered variations in a form of evolutionary selection. Both factors are essential to change. The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community.' An American pragmatist, James saw only 'ambiguous potentialities of development' arising from the power of individual initiative.[49] He believed that 'the evolutionary view of history [that of Spencer and his followers], when it denies the vital importance of individual initiative, is then, an utterly vague and unscientific conception, a lapse from modern scientific determinism into the most ancient oriental fatalism … no geographical environment can produce a given type of mind. It can only foster and further certain types fortuitously produced, and thwart and frustrate others.'[50]

In 1898 in his *Role of the Individual in History*, Georgi Plekhanov took a Marxist approach in which he asserted that individual traits did not randomly occur but were the product of socio-economic trends, and thus the traits that were attributed to individual initiative were really the product of wider developments.[51] Plekhanov was responding to Russian Narodniks who held that the heroes of history were the revolutionaries usually armed with a bomb, rather than the masses. Plekhanov accused these 'subjectivists' of being 'out to endow the 'individual' with the greatest possible role in history [and] have refused to recognise mankind's historical development as a law-governed process'. He famously clashed with Lenin whom he also accused of being a subjectivist over his support for the vanguard of the proletariat. Plekhanov argued that the role of individuals was exaggerated because they were visible; while individuals could affect the particularities of events, they could not change the course of history or the productive forces. Plekhanov argued against a 'fatalistic', or crude Marxist analysis.[52] He said that History was determined by the change in the particular.[53] Influential individuals, however and at the same time, were motivated by the inevitable, and their place in history. Engels gave a good guide here on what is known as 'necessity abhorring a vacuum'.[54] 'Men

49 James, 'Great men and their environment', p. 227.

50 James, 'Great men and their environment', p. 445.

51 G. V. Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961, fp. 1898).

52 Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History*.

53 Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History*.

54 David Cawthon, 'Marx on leadership', in *Philosophical Foundations of Leadership* (New York: Routledge, 2002). See Friedrich Engels on Napoleon, 'if a Napoleon had been lack-

make their history themselves', wrote Engels in January 1894: 'but not as yet with a collective will according to a collective plan or even a definite, delimited given society. Their aspirations clash, and for that very reason all such societies are governed by *necessity*, the complement and form of appearance of which is *accident*. The necessity which here asserts itself amidst all accident is again ultimately economic necessity. This is where the so-called great men come in for treatment. That such and such a man and precisely that man arises at a particular time in a particular country is, of course, pure chance. But cut him out and there will be a demand for such a substitute, and this substitute will be found, good or bad, but in the long run he will be found.'

So the counterfactual is that if that particular person had died early, more or less the same outcome could have taken place. W.H. Shaw believed Plekhanov conceded individual free will and accorded it a decisive role in the outcome of history but his problem was that he handcuffed individuals to a chain of inevitability.[55] Technically most Marxists argued for historical materialism, that there was a dialectical relationship between individuals and the great forces that governed the movement of society with individuals being significant but they also invoked the 'causal chain': 'no person, no matter how talented, capable or farsighted, can determine the main course of historical development, which is shaped by objective forces. However, under critical circumstances, the role played by individuals can be decisive, the last decisive link in the chain of causality.'[56] Others accorded individuals free will, but argued primacy, in the aggregate, to social processes which conformed to social laws. Antonio Gramsci later rallied against this 'law of large numbers'.[57]

How did these thinkers write their history? Plekhanov hedged his history: clearly he believed that had Robespierre died in January 1793 his place would have been taken by somebody else.[58] However he also argued that Robespierre had a singular twist which 'he alone could have given, and did give, to

---

ing, another would have filled the place, is proved by the fact that the man was always found as soon as he became necessary: Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell', in S. Ryazanskaya (ed.), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 467–468.

55 William H. Shaw, 'Plekhanov on the Role of the Individual in History', *Studies in Soviet Thought* 35(1988)3, p. 247–265.

56 Rob Sewell, 'The Decisive Role of the Individual in History', in: *In Defence of Marxism* (2005), https://www.marxist.com/about-us.htm, accessed 25 January 2020.

57 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 412, 428–429.

58 Martyn Lyon, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), p. 4–18.

the situation'.[59] On the other hand, if we read Carlyle's history of the French Revolution, he was not arguing merely for the significance of individuals, heroes, but for the interconnectedness of individuals and their context and for role of the collective will.[60] For his part, so did Carlyle: when discussing the responsibility for the condition of France on the eve of the Revolution, he 'tells us that some men blamed Turgot, others said it was Necker, others said it was the queen; they argued 'it was he, it was she, it was that'. Carlyle caught hold of one side of the truth when he said that every man who had done less than his duty had contributed to the evil – had brought his thread to the production of that piece of historical tapestry. 'Friends! it was every scoundrel that had lived, and quacklike pretended to be doing, and been only eating and misdoing, in all provinces of life, as Shoeblack or as Sovereign Lord, each in his degree.'[61]

2 Twentieth Century Humanist Debate over Great Individuals and Contingency in History

When Sidney Hook came to discuss historians' writings on great individuals in his 1943 *The Hero in History; A Study in Limitation and Possibility*, he found it hard to find examples of extreme or pure 'Carlylean' or 'Plekhanovian' biographies.[62] He had been a communist in his youth and then about-turned to be critical of all forms of 'social determinism' whether inspired by Spencer, Hegel or orthodox Marxists. Hook invoked and commented on the earlier versions of the debate from Carlyle but his main concern, however, was over contemporary historical practice at a time that Lenin, Stalin and Hitler ignited interest in leaders' biographies and the role of the great individual in history. He considered the debate was between groups of thinkers holding different points of view on heroes: those who emphasized 'man's agency' over the importance of structures. He sought a reasonable reconciliation of the seemingly contradictory positions, just as James has done, and in this regard he was an interactionalist. Rather than good examples of historians' balanced accounts,

59 Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History*, p. 46. See also E.J. Tapp, 'The Role of the Individual in history', in: *The Australian Quarterly* 30(1958)1, p. 61.

60 Trygve Throntveit, 'William James's Ethical Republic', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72(2011)2, p. 256.

61 Herbert Butterfield, 'The Role of the Individual in History', in: *History* (*New Series*) 40(1955)138–139, p. 5. This was the published address he gave at the Historical Association's AGM at Cambridge 31 December 1953.

62 Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (New York: John Day Co., 1943).

he chose two problematic and dated biographical accounts: Frederick Adams Woods, *The Influence of Monarchs* (1913) and Leon Trotsky's *Russian Revolution* (1930).[63] He did this because they were useful for the methodological point he wanted to make: 'Sometimes what counts most is the situation, sometimes it is the man' and counterfactuals and contingency were tools for determining which applied in any given case.

Two background aspects need emphasising: first that Hook wrote amid a huge flourishing of historians' biography on 'great individuals'; and, secondly, he did not simply repeat the nineteenth century debate. He believed that historians too rarely considered 'scientifically meaningful' counterfactuals and contingency. In this view he was inspired by J.C. Squire's idea of counterfactual history, his 1931 *If or History Rewritten*, but argued it was mostly poorly executed and lapsed into imaginary history.[64] Hook lingered over Eduard Meyer's consideration of a Persian victory at the Battle of Marathon, Carola Oman's Napoleon successfully crossing the English Channel, and Winston Churchill's alternative history of a Confederate victory at Gettysburg.[65] Clearly Hook had Marxist historians, however, in his sights. His chapter on Trotsky is the most important in his book. Trotsky was a Marxist but Hook argued he was also a good researcher and so had concluded that in 1930 that, if Lenin had not been present, the Bolshevik Revolution might not have happened for many years. Hook re-examined the issue and argued that, without Lenin, the October Revolution would not have occurred at all.

It was a rare American or British historian who did not write biography at some stage in their career, even in the mid-twentieth century when it was said to be 'out of favour' amongst professional historians.[66] We should not under-

63 Frederick Adams Woods, *The influence of Monarchs* (London: Macmillan, 1913). Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman, 3 vols. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009, f.p. 1930).

64 J.C. Squire (ed.), *If or History Rewritten* (New York: The Viking Press, 1931). Indeed it was reissued as *If it happened otherwise: lapses into imaginary history* (London: Longmans, 1932).

65 Hook cited Weber's response to Weber by attempting to judge between possibilities, 'Critical studies in the logic of the cultural studies' (1906) in Edith Hanke et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. xxxiii; Carola Oman, *Napoleon at the Channel* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1942); Winston Churchill, 'If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg', in Squire, *If or History Rewritten*.

66 Work that concentrates on biographical turn at the end of the twentieth century tends to suggest that biography was 'ostracized from the academy' by historians (Meister) during the twentieth century and remains the 'profession's unloved stepchild' (Nasaw), the 'bastard child of academe' (Weinberg).

estimate the significant number of historians, however, who both identified primarily as biographers, before the 'biographical turn' of the late 20th century, and, moreover, wrote about the methodology and theory. They constructed biography series and other supporting infrastructures in the period that is regarded as fallow for biography. Among American historians, if we consider Clyde N. Wilson's 1983 survey of the 'greatest' twentieth century USA historians, three quarters wrote at least one identifiable biographical monograph and many were authors for the *Dictionary of American Biography*, or more closely associated with it, such as one of the founders J. Franklin Jameson, or editors Dumas Malone and John A. Garraty.[67] The latter published the *Nature of Biography* in 1957.[68] Arthur S. Link was the 'foremost historian of the twenty-eighth president', who edited 69 volumes of Woodrow Wilson's papers.[69] Others wrote 'biography in the grand manner' like Douglas Southall Freeman on Washington, Albert Beveridge and Dumas on Jefferson and James G. Randall on Lincoln.[70] Link published widely on the issue of leadership.[71] Allan Nevins persuaded Dodd, Mead and Company to launch an American political leaders series in the 1930s which he edited; one of several biographies Hamilton Fish won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937.

Perhaps the most influential of those writing on the role of the individuals was Herbert Butterfield who argued in his 1953 article 'The *Role of the Individual in History*' that 'those who stress the role of the individual in history are ipso facto committed to recognizing the importance of contingency'.[72] He built his argument on insights from two philosophers. Bryn Mawr College philosopher Dorothy Walsh's 1937 work on 'the Philosophical Implications of the historical enterprise' concerned individual choices.[73]

---

67 Clyde N. Wilson (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Historians* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1983).

68 John A. Garraty, *The Nature of Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1957).

69 Arthur S. Link et al. (eds.), *The papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966–1994).

70 Wilson, *Twentieth Century American historians*, p. 247.

71 For example see: Arthur S. Link, 'A Decade of Biographical Contributions to Recent American History', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 34(1934), p. 637–652; and Arthur S. Link, 'Woodrow Wilson: the Philosophy, methods and impact of leadership', in: Arthur P. Dudden (ed.), *Woodrow Wilson and the World of Today* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1957), p. 1–21.

72 For a discussion of Butterfield's influence, see G.R. Elton, 'Herbert Butterfield and the Study of History', *The Historical Journal* 27(1984)3, p. 729–743.

73 Dorothy Walsh, 'Philosophical Implications of the Historical Enterprise', in: *Journal of Philosophy* 34(1937)3, p. 57–64. Interestingly, Butterfield did not make reference to his contemporary, Isaiah Berlin: John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin. An Interpretation of his Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

At the same time traditional historians in the wake of Carlyle and his twentieth century admirer, G.M. Trevelyan, periodically mounted a biographical response to the Annales movement and socio-economic history. As a measure of the Annales school's impact on biographical practice, Alain Corbin estimated that the proportion of articles on biography in the *Revue Historique* from its establishment in 1876 to 1972 'dropped by nearly ninety per cent and those on political history fell by over thirty per cent. Correspondingly, the number of articles on economic history quadrupled and those on social history nearly doubled. Political history remained the largest single category, but by 1972 economic and social history had replaced biography and religious history as the next largest'.[74]

The Annales School was not as popular in Britain or America, however, as it was in Europe. Eric Hobsbawm was one of the few British historians who annually met with Annales historians such as Fernand Braudel in Paris to discuss labour history in the 1970s.[75] Hosbawm did not publish a biographical monograph, except about his own life. More commonly, those writing British biography, such as Derek Beales in his 1981 inaugural lecture as Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, 'History and Biography', critiqued the critique of *histoire biographique*. Beales argued that biography had been 'too much disparaged'.[76] He took aim at Fernand Braudel and others in the Annales School whose view of structures, expanses and profound tendencies was, he argued, pure moonshine'.

When a great historian can mistake a person for a trend, when it is thought more important to analyse social backgrounds than opinions, then the time has come for a reaction.[77]

There was a shift in the debate, however, over 'conception of History and of the historian's task' between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.[78] That is, two things were happening: historians left, right and centre, were writing biographies that can be overlooked in the idea of a more general biographical turn. Secondly increasingly historians who were writing biography were

74 Lynn Hunt, 'French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the Annales', in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21(1986)2, p. 212–213. Stuart Clark, *The Annales School. Critical Assessments, vol. 1, Histories and Overviews* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 27.

75 Richard J. Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm. A Life* (London: Little Brown, 2019), p. 500–503.

76 Derek Beales, 'History and Biography, An inaugural lecture' in T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine (eds.), *History and Biography: Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996 f.p. 1981), p. 269.

77 Beales, 'History and Biography', p. 282.

78 Tapp, 'The Role of the Individual in history', p. 51–64.

putting individuals more carefully into their place. As E.J. Tapp noted in 1958, in addition to the 'proliferation of biographies', historiographical explanation was now taking contingency into account in a way that it had not previously: 'If we … are more reluctant to attribute the success or failure of a social movement to a single individual, it is because we know now that the ascription of tremendous human achievements to one man is too simple a solution to be the truth of the matter. We know too that the play of the contingent in human affairs may determine whether or not innate capacities for greatness are ever afforded opportunity for their manifestation.'[79]

3 Historians' Biographical Balancing Acts

In 1944, Albert William Levi was fatalistic about the debate among historians when he reviewed Hook's book, *The Hero in History*, arguing that there would 'always be' those with 'scientific and romantic' temperaments who would argue over the role of the great man in history. He added that 'every generation must face the question anew'.[80] Levi claimed that Hook was dangling his toe in the mid-twentieth century in a debate that was long-running:

> The positions are worn thin. On the one hand, there is Carlyle. Over against him there are Herbert Spencer and Engels. They are racing madly toward the finish line. But calm and collected in white flannels at the tape are the great mediators. Sidney Hook is one of them. Not the great man alone, not social forces alone, but both of them are causal factors in the stream of history! With slightly different emphasis and vocabulary, Sidney Hook is saying substantially what William James said in 'Great Men and their Environment' – only James said it in thirty pages, and Hook takes almost three hundred![81]

It might not have appeared to be so in 1944 but we should not put Hook into the Victorian debate between Carlyle and Plekhanov; he is part of a second phase of the debate that Butterfield and Carr waged. Firstly this paper has sketched out how the backdrop to each differed: interactionalism in the nineteenth century and contingency in the twentieth century.

---

79 Tapp, 'The Role of the Individual in history', p. 51–64.

80 Albert William Levi, 'Book review, The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility', *Ethics* 54(1944)2, p. 152–153.

81 Levi, 'The Hero in History', p. 152.

In this paper, I have stressed that the biographical turn is an interdisciplinary wave but it overlooks the extent to which biography has been at centre of most historians' writing since Carlyle. In this regard, it is useful to consider historians separately from wider biographical developments. British, American and other historians writing in English continued to write biography throughout the twentieth century before 'the biographical turn'. Significant lives in history continue to be examined by historians and biographers contemporarily.[82] Neo-Carlylists include Boris Johnson, who believes differences are the inevitable by-product of 'human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth', and considered a woman, Margaret Thatcher, as his heroine.[83] More explicitly Margaret MacMillan has drawn on Carlyle's writing in her account of well-known as well as little-known men and women in history, who she holds were largely responsible for changing the course of history and shaping their contemporaries' lives.[84]

82 Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 50.

83 Boris Johnson's 'What Would Maggie do Today?' Margaret Thatcher Lecture, *The Telegraph* 28 November 2013.

84 Margaret MacMillan, *History's People: Personalities and the Past* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2015).

The Backside of the Biography: Microhistory as a Research Tool

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon

1 In the House

In a big house in the Reykjavík area at the end of the 20th century, a party was held; it was a large gathering, the host a nationally-renowned genealogist. A girlfriend who was present later told me that the focus of the event had been a large wall in a noticeable position in the reception room, covered with pictures of people from the beginning of that century, and the 19th. She noticed that the guests stopped at the wall, and many of them took plenty of time to examine the pictures and discuss them – as most shared the interests of their host. In due course she herself went over to the wall to look and, interestingly enough, she too became absorbed in the faces of the long-dead individuals. She saw features she recognized – for of course she knew the host's family well.

'Isn't that your great-aunt Edda?' my friend asked the host as he passed by. The genealogist floundered as he falteringly explained that he had bought the photographs at a flea market in Sweden. He added, with an ambiguous glint in his eye, that the people in the pictures had nothing to do with him at all.

Silence fell. Conversations petered out, and an oppressive hush fell over the chattering guests. One could have heard a needle drop. My friend, gazing at her host in astonishment, felt that time stood still. Realising what was happening, the genealogist was flustered. He did his best to justify the fact that he did not know these 'faces of eternity' – old pictures carrying with them, as is well known, an ambiance of eternity. He remarked that he had simply admired the pictures. It had nothing to do with his interest in genealogy.

The guests at the party were thunderstruck. Those who had had a drink or three were especially reluctant to accept this shenanigan, or even 'farce', as one put it. Most of the guests probably felt they had been tricked – and the gathering gradually broke up. The genealogist was left sitting all alone, halfway through the evening, gazing with empty eyes at the faces on the wall, which appeared absolutely indifferent.

For a time I was captivated by my friend's story. Before long I concluded that the genealogist had, by his deed, disrupted people's perception of reality,

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_008

through a simple 'staging'. *That's the kind of history I want to do!* I thought. I am aware that displaying pictures only meets with approval in a certain context – when people can relate the images to individuals, events or places with which they are familiar. In a different, unexpected context, pictures of people lose all significance – and that is why the guests at the party reacted as they did. They felt that they had been deliberately duped, by subverting the conventions of presenting family photographs. Tradition – or perhaps simply habit – had taught them that family photographs – regular biographies – should be viewed with a certain attitude, in a certain manner. The knowledge base of those who examined the wall of pictures that evening at the genealogist's home was, quite suddenly, trampled underfoot.

The same is true of biographical or just historical discourse: a place is allocated to it in the knowledge stores of the mind – a place where its individual features will become clear. And it is only in that predetermined place and context that the parts become comprehensible. I sensed this when I published a version of this story in a paper in a registry of historians in 2002; my colleagues who discussed it regarded the genealogist's actions as incomprehensible. If we find ourselves unable to link the knowledge to the historical progression – to grasp the categories which are supposed to keep individual life story or history together – it loses its significance, and is put aside, along with the miscellanea that are of no importance. This mindset has a long academic history in scholarship – where it is steadfastly maintained that the world can only be comprehended in the big context, where we manage to fill in the gaps. Each individual event (or photograph) has, according to this principle, little significance *per se*. The arguments and principles of this mindset will be examined in this article – in a ethical or religious context, picked almost randomly. The same could be done with any other subject matter.

I maintain that the ideology of general history, which is grounded primarily in the predetermined pattern of the grand narrative, has lost its way. For a long time I had hope that microhistory, as it developed in Italy and other countries, might provide an answer to this obligation which appears to be placed on historians' shoulders – to have their minds constantly on the structure of the society and larger entities. In its early days, microhistory certainly made a promising start in that direction; and it has opened up a view of reality which was unexpected, and had not been explored before. Hence it has marked turning points in one field after another of history. This ideological reframing is the subject of this article where I am planning to look at few micohistorical monographs that have approached the biography with a new and exciting frame of reference.

2 Prescription for Murder

Dr Thomas Neill Cream was a physician and serial killer who practised his profession and his extra-curricular pursuits in the United Kingdom and North America in the latter half of the 19th century. Whatever the scholarly principles, one might presume that a doctor who hated women – and especially prostitutes in search of an abortion – would be an ideal subject for a historian, from any viewpoint, including the biographical one. The author of *A Prescription for Murder*, Angus McLaren, at least, is of that view, though adding that 'serious social historians who have turned to the history of crime to answer 'big' questions about changing economic relations dismiss as juvenile the fixation on acts of individualistic violence'.[1]

McLaren takes a different path. He explores specifically the biography – the life and deeds – of a serial killer who went further than most at that time, yet has received less attention, especially in view of the gravity of his crimes. Contributory factors here are the social status of the killer on the one hand, and of his victims on the other, the education and gender of each, the ethical and moral demands of society, and the authorities' emphasis on cases of this nature. McLaren's approach is to start by recounting in detail Cream's entire career, and how he organized his life story. In the latter part of the book he explores the murders of the prostitutes, and finally he places them in a societal context, addressing the status of women, and especially of those engaged in unlawful activities.[2] But McLaren's focus is invariably on the subject he is studying, and he does not permit himself the indulgence of writing it within the predetermined model of the grand narrative. McLaren is thus of the view that 'Cream is in a sense the guide who leads us through this culture' and, by focussing primarily on Cream – his biography – and his circumstances, McLaren avoids the trap of addressing the subject in terms of the grand narrative.[3]

McLaren's study is a fine example of the way that it is possible to work almost entirely on the basis of small units with the aid of the methods of microhistory, without falling prey to the temptation to frame the research within the grand narrative. In his book, the author succeeds in revealing faults in the grand narrative, such as for instance modernization, or the idea behind the Christian church, both of which are grounded in the assumption that the

1 Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder. The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. xii–xiii.

2 Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder*, p. 62.

3 Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder*, p. 62.

progress of mankind is an inevitable process, and, furthermore, that the progress is ethical, leading to a better, healthier life for humanity. The judgement passed on prostitution from such a scholarly perspective goes without saying. The women are condemned, implicitly and explicitly, and the researcher can never properly explore the issue, and the realities, due to the obvious presumptions of the grand narrative. Seen through the prism of the grand narrative, prostitutes did not only debauch themselves and others – in opposition to the teaching of the Christian church – but also spread disease ('venereal' or sexually-transmitted disease), thus causing irreparable harm to family life, and aborted their unborn and unwanted children, and contributed to the decline of respectable society and Christian values. Their 'sinful' lives meant that they were seen almost as deserving to die; and for that reason men like Dr Cream remained free for so long. Even if prostitutes are presented as 'victims of circumstance', that more compassionate approach does not alter the fact that they remain victims of the definitions of people who see the world in other terms than they do. And once Dr Cream was safely locked up, his case received little attention, according to McLaren's book.

When individual cases are examined from variable perspectives, entirely different conclusions are reached. In brief, prostitution may be said to have been a normal aspect of lower-class life in the 19th century, part of a process through which many women passed at a certain period of their lives. Middle-class values made this aspect of the lives of many working-class women not only more difficult in practical terms, but also more shameful. Women who seized the opportunities offered by prostitution were at risk of ruining their good name for life – not due to the act itself, but due to the intervention of police, judges, clergy and the 'moral' bourgeoisie.[4] In this way one may gain, through a biographical research, an entirely different perspective on a world which is defined primarily by those who wield power, and whose background is absolutely unlike that of the individuals in question. The world of the prostitute is thus ground down in the mill of the grand narrative, and refashioned within the framework of the ideology upheld by the powerful, on which historians tend to rely. But McLaren's approach is different: the various focuses of his book provide us with fresh insights into a complex community of various individual biographies and social groups. Whether his subject is the status of physicians in 19th century society, the significance of blackmail, abortion, police investigation techniques, the moral viewpoint of the church, or the prospects of the lumpenproletariat, McLaren's vision negates the expectations of the grand narrative.

4 Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder*, p. 70.

Women, for example, become agents in their own right on the historical stage – instead of being perceived as victims of circumstance. They take certain chances in their lives, evaluate their options, and build up around them a social network on which they can rely. That network functions as a bulwark that safeguards the activities which are under their control, and shelters them from the madness of the world outside.[5]

I have chosen McLaren's book as an example, among other reasons because he is a historian who works with the methods of microhistory when dealing with an unusual biography, though without explicitly identifying with either methodologies.

And here we see one of the features of biographical and microhistorical rhetoric, i.e. how divided they can be, and how many historians have adopted it without seeing themselves specifically as biographers or microhistorians. This 'deconstruction' of the scholarly ideology has prevented any specific groups dominating the discourse of biography or microhistory by formulating 'rules' of the discipline. For that reason, microhistory has, for exampel, been linked to a range of scholarly traditions in Europe and the US, such as the new cultural history in the English-speaking world, and everyday life history, *Alltagsgeschichte*, in the German-speaking world.[6] The background from which these traditions emerged is similar to that of microhistory; they share many

5 Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder*, p. 127–138.

6 Works include inter alia: Carlo M. Cipolla, *Faith, Reason, and the Plague in Seventeenth-Century Tuscany* (New York: Norton & Company, 1979); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Random House, 1984). See scholarly discussion of Darnton's book: Harold Mah, 'Suppressing the Text: The Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre'. *History Workshop Journal* 31 (Spring 1991), p. 1–20; James Fernandez, 'Historians Tell Tales: Of Cartesian Cats and Gallic Cockfights'. *Journal of Modern History* 60(1988), p. 113–127; Dominick LaCapra, 'Chartier, Darnton, and the Great Symbol Massacre'. *Journal of Modern History* 60(1988), p. 95–112; Robert Darnton, 'The Symbolic Element in History'. *Journal of Modern History* 58(1986), p. 218–234; Roger Chartier, 'Text, Symbols, and Frenchness'. *Journal of Modern History* 57(1985), p. 682–695; Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). See dispute regarding Davis' book: Robert Finlay, 'The Refashioning of Martin Guerre'. *American Historical Review* 93(1988), p. 553–571; Natalie Zemon Davis, 'On The Lame'. *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), p. 572–603; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou. The Promised Land of Error*. Translated by Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin. A Seventeenth Century Clergyman* (New York: Norton & Company, 1970). It should be pointed out that these writings are simply examples of works that relate indirectly to the ideology of microhistory; Ladurie's *Montaillou*, for instance, falls only partly within that definition. The first part of the book is strongly influenced by the French Annales school, to which the author belonged, while the latter part has more in common with microhistory.

of its characteristics and are connected to the biographical focus of history writing.

3 Ethical Issues, Religion, Biographies and Microhistory

Religion is a good example of a grand narrative that has, in my mind, haunted historical analysis of past societies. The focus on the 'institution' has, naturally enough, received by far the most attention. Microhistory has the quality of being able to approach subjects of this nature in an entirely new way. I shall take some examples below of microhistorical research on interesting subjects relating to religion and the biographical approach. The research subjects have the common feature of having influenced how the subject of religion may be addressed differently from the usual approach in the past. The examples taken here will not open up doors to new knowledge of religion: that will be done by demonstrating how a large and complex subject such as people's belief in a higher power may be addressed in new and unexpected ways using the methods of microhistory.

The first book for consideration is set in a religious house and called *A Convent Tale: A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan* by P. Renée Baernstein, published in 2002.[7] The subject is the San Paolo Converso convent in Milan in the period 1535–1635, and the Angelic nuns who lived there. While the convent may be said to be the focus of the book, a number of notable characters make an appearance during the century covered by the book. The book is in this sense a collective biography.

The first of these is Ludovica Torelli, who founded the convent in the early 16th century, just after the Reformation. At that time the convent was open, which meant that the nuns were free to move around the town, and to receive visits at the convent. There was a close relationship between the nuns and an order of Barnabite monks, and the two groups worked together. One of the nuns, Paola Antonia Negri, was probably the most renowned of the Angelics. She was what is known as a 'living saint', believed to be an intermediary between mankind and Christ, who spoke through her. She claimed to have divine authority over the Barnabites, and exerted control over ecclesiastical matters concerning the order. Her position of influence led to San Paolo Converso finding itself under the scrutiny of the Spanish Inquisition.

7 P. Renée Baernstein, *A Convent Tale. A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan* (London: Routledge, 2002).

In brief, the convent had a narrow escape from the severe penalties of the Inquisition; but afterwards changes were made. The Angelics became an enclosed order, and could no longer leave the convent or receive visitors. Interaction with the Barnabites largely ceased. Paola Antonia Negri was imprisoned, made the scapegoat for others in the convent, who strove to maintain the convent's good name in order to avoid further attentions from the Inquisition. By this time the Counter-Reformation had been launched in the Catholic church, enforcing new and stricter standards for religious houses.

The Sfondrati family is part of the story. They were an influential Milan family, who had contributed many nuns to the San Paolo convent. Within the convent they retained their elite family status, and enjoyed a range of privileges. For many years Sfondrati nuns were among those who ran the convent. One of them was Agata Sfondrati, who made strenuous efforts to improve the convent in the early 17th century; but the other nuns had had enough of the Sfondrati family's privileged status in the convent, and she paid the price.

This study may be classified as gendered microhistory, in which women, who were otherwise inconspicuous or even invisible, are brought into the light, in order to tell their life stories as agents in the historical process. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this work is that it seeks to tell the story of the society around the nuns through their story – for instance the Inquisition, the Counter-Reformation and other major phenomena of the time. The book is thus written through the grand narrative, but from the perspective of the participants in the story – their collective biography.

Finally, let us examine an unusual book that relates to power struggles between laity and clergy in past centuries, within the church and outside it. Ruth Mackay's *The Baker Who Pretended to Be King of Portugal* (2012) tells the story of a baker, Gabriel de Espinosa, who arrived in the small Spanish town of Madrigal de las Altas Torres in the late 16th century.[8] De Espinosa conspired with a friar, Fray Miguel de los Santos, with the aim – bizarre as it may seem – of installing the baker on the throne of Portugal.

King Sebastian I of Portugal had been killed in 1578 in battle against the Moroccan leader Abd Al-Malik at Alcazarquivir. As he had died without issue, his death gave rise to a contest for the succession between King Philip II the King of Spain and a certain Don Antonio, the illegitimate son of Luis of Portugal, uncle of Philip II. Don Antonio would have had a strong claim to the throne, had he been able to prove that his parents had been secretly married,

8 Ruth Mackay, *The Baker Who Pretended to be King of Portugal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. xix.

as he maintained. Failing such evidence, it was Philip II who took over control of Portugal; but Don Antonio and his supporters continued their campaign against him.

But Don Antonio was not the only threat to Philip II's claim to the Portuguese throne: rumours and stories circulated that King Sebastian was still alive, and in hiding, and these had a powerful influence on the attitudes of Portuguese subjects to Philip II. Tales were told that King Sebastian had not in fact died at Alcazarquivir, but had escaped to Morocco with the help of loyal followers. The rumours undermined Philip II's authority in Portugal, at the time when Don Antonio was trying to raise forces to attack the king. Mackay points out how Portuguese ideas about the nation developed in different ways, under the authority of a Spanish king. According to rumour, two men had better claims to the throne, both of them Portuguese. The people of Portugal developed an anti-Spanish nationalism, which was curious in view of the fact that the Spanish and Portuguese royal families were closely related – essentially the same family. The nation's desire for a Portuguese king, together with rumours that Sebastian was alive, created an opening for various imposters claiming to be King Sebastian, back to reclaim his crown. The phenomenon of pretenders posing as the king was known as *Sebastianismi*.

This was the context in which Fray Miguel de los Santos saw an opportunity for his plan to install Don Antonio as king of Portugal. The friar was a loyal supporter of Don Antonio. His plan was for Gabriel de Espinosa the baker to win the trust of a nun, Ana of Austria, who was of royal birth and a cousin of Philip II. He was to convince her that he was actually King Sebastian; once Gabriel was accepted as King Sebastian, Don Antonio would come forward to unmask him as an imposter, and take over the crown himself. The plan, naturally enough, did not work, and the baker and the priest were arrested, to be repeatedly interrogated by the Inquisition in an effort to work out what had happened.

Ruth Mackay tells the baker's biography in such a way as to throw light on Spanish and Portuguese societies, and on the underlying factors which could lead to events of this kind. The book falls within the framework of microhistory, as Ruth Mackay tells the story of an event which, in the broader context, is not important in itself, but is intended to show how the characters perceived their surroundings and interpreted events in which they were involved. The author sets out to examine the events entirely on their own terms, without being distracted by the ideological norms of the grand narrative, but with the aid of the biographical method.

The book may be seen as a contribution to the cultural history of Portugal and Spain, as Mackay uses the tale of the baker mainly to throw light

on the society of the Iberian peninsula and various aspects of it, including folk culture – how the interaction of culture and everyday life worked. She examines the Iberian peninsula, for instance, as a fluid community of vagabonds. Rumours could spread readily in Spain and Portugal, due to the vagabond society that had developed there. People of lower social classes do not appear to have had any strong emotional bond with their home town or birthplace, and often spent their lives wandering from place to place. The roads of the Iberian peninsula were always much travelled, as huge numbers moved from place to place in search of work, shelter, or simply a better life. That flow of population from region to region brought with it news, rumours and a variety of information. Thus, the tales of King Sebastian spread rapidly, weakening the position of King Philip II, as growing numbers of people believed the stories they heard. Plazas, taverns and inns became meeting-places where people gathered to exchange news and information from far and wide.

For that reason landlords of inns and taverns were valued sources of information when investigating some event, as they were at the centre of the information hub, and they were known to possess that knowledge. The author's intention is not simply to tell the story of the events for their own sake. She seeks to use them to demonstrate by a good example of a personal biography how Portuguese and Spanish societies functioned as a news medium, and how rumours and tales were a part of people's lives, that extended into the political realm.

Mackay was able to make use of excellent sources from the inquisitors who were appointed by Philip II to investigate the case, and recorded in writing the evidence of all the people involved. Mackay thus had access to various testimonies from Fray Miguel and Gabriel the baker themselves. She also made use of letters and private documents of Philip II, who communicated directly with both his cousin Ana of Austria and the inquisitors, as well as other correspondence from Spanish and Portuguese courtiers, in which they wrote about various events relating to Spain and Portugal at that time. Mackay also comments on a specific sort of document which she finds especially interesting, i.e. *discursos de la vida*, a form of life story. When a peasant was accused of an offence, or witnessed some event, the Inquisition would have them recount the story of their life – their biography: where they came from, where they were going, what had happened to them in life, and markworthy events or people they had come across. All this was written down and kept by the Inquisition. Truth be told. Study of such sources, which have something in common with egodocuments, demands unusual historical methods with the help of the biographical approach. For that reason, the methods of microhistory have

been of great importance in studies of this nature, as the above-mentioned books indicate.

4 Biogaphies of People on the Periphery

The content of the books, described here in this article, shows how research of a high standard which relates to ethical issues or religion, and utilises the methods of microhistory in one form or another, can open an unexpected perspective on the subjects of past centuries. It must be borne in mind that many more examples could be taken of material which has been produced on these terms, discussing such subjects as bigamy, murder in church, everyday life in the eyes of a 17th-century priest, people in the grip of the Inquisition, a Muslim traveling in Europe in the 16th century, and so on – all research projects that rely on the biography as a conceptual framwork.[9] This is all material that throws new light on the relationship between people and ethical issues, in one way or another, with a critical approach to the biographical way of doing historical research with the help of the methods of microhistory.

There is no doubt that scholars who have adopted the microhistorical approach have shaken up historical methods in general, but without making any deep impression. I do not know, for instance, a single microhistorian who has sought to reject the connection of microhistory to a broader perspective or the grand narrative. Italian microhistorian Gianna Pomata is of the view that these connections between microhistory and larger entities are unavoidable – that it is impossible to conceive of history-writing without that connection to the grand narrative. All the work would, she maintains, serve little purpose if it were not to be placed in a more general context.[10]

Here the question turns, of course, on the relationship between the fragment and the whole – micro/macro approach. Hans Renders and Binne de

9 See the following: Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook, *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance. A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Craig Harline and Eddy Put, *A Bishop's Tale. Aathia Hovius Among His Flock in Seventeenth-Century Flanders* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Bryan Givens, *Judging Maria De Macedo, A Female Visionary and the Inquisition in Early Modern Portugal* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2011); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: In Search of Leo Africanus. A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

10 Gianna Pomata, 'Close-Ups and Long Shots: Combining Particular and General in Writing the Histories of Women and Men', in: Hans Medick and Anne-Charlott Trepp (eds.), *Geschlechtergeschichte und Allgemeine Geschichte. Herausforderungen und Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), p. 99–124.

Haan take a rather favourable view of the debate on the 'representativeness' of each subject, by pointing out that 'the supposed representativeness of an individual, a human being from the past, contributes in the first place to a better understanding and confirmation of exactly those historical structures and categories for which he or she is considered representative.'[11] The authors also make a very interesting point about the academic relationship between the fragment and the whole: 'Too often it 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. It teaches us rather more about other social relationships which exercised unexpected impact on general history.'[12] Here, Renders and De Haan, underline important factors relating to the practice of history in general.

I am of the opinion that microhistorians have sacrificed the potential of microhistory by writing their research findings within the framework of the grand narrative.[13] But is it possible to change course, so that small units are once again in the spotlight? That can best be achieved by taking seriously the microhistorian's ideological understanding of the significance of small units and examining their composition and content with the idea of gaining knowledge of the past and related events.[14] That is where the biographcial approach becomes a critical element in the development of the methods of microhistory in a new and exciting scholarly direction.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support I enjoyed from the Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannís, no. 184976-051 – Grant of Excellence) during my research.

11 Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, 'The Limits of Representativeness. Biography, Life Writing and Microhistory', *Storia della Storiografia* 59–60 (2011), p. 41–42.

12 Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, 'The Limits of Representativeness', p. 39–40.

13 All this is discussed in detail in: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2017). See also Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013).

14 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, '*The Singularization of History*: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge'. *Journal of Social History* 36:3 (2003), p. 701–735.

PART 2

Biographers at Work

∴

Beyond Verification and Falsification: Biography as Go-Between of Historical Truth

Eric Palmen

Biography has the ability to confront abstract historical conceptions with the concrete, the individual, and the extraordinary. What are we talking about when we investigate the Enlightenment, modernism or the civilization process? According to Hans Renders, biography has often been used to verify general concepts about history, mostly in a commemorative way. If biography is considered as a scholarly discipline, it should refrain from stating the obvious. It enables us to question and even falsify commonly used truisms of historical developments and conceptualizations.[1] In that sense, biography – to paraphrase Nigel Hamilton – has the ability to function as a corrective to history.[2]

In this article I want to address a typical historical construction of Dutch history using this concept of biography as corrective. The sociology of Dutch society in the nineteenth and twentieth century has often been described as a unique system of checks and balances in which the main religious and political dominions were strictly segregated while their elites participated in common administrative bodies, so that the country remained manageable.[3] This system is called pillarization (in Dutch: *verzuiling*). Until the 1960s Protestants, Catholics and Social Democrats formed their own 'pillar' in Dutch society, in which they organized their associations and institutions, newspapers and trade unions. All others, such as the Liberals, belong to the so-called 'residual pillar'. Eventually, the political, cultural and sexual revolution of the Sixties liberated us of the strict boundaries of pillarization.

1 Hans Renders, 'The Limits of Representativeness. Biography, Life Writing, and Microhistory', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan (ed.) *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing* (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2014), p. 129:138.

2 Nigel Hamilton, 'Biography as corrective', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (ed.), The *Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (London/New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group 2017), p. 15–30.

3 A distinguished representative of this 'school' is the political scientist Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation. Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_009

The contemporary historiography of pillarization questions this point of view. The historian Hans Righart investigated similarities between the organization of Dutch societies and other European countries. Is pillarization really a unique Dutch system of social order?[4] Hans Blom and Herman van der Wusten had concerns about the general validity of the concept. Does it not ignore the local diversity of Dutch society?[5] Some historians even dispute the concept of pillarization itself. Is pillarization not a national myth, a caricature of the way we dealt with diversity in our country? Still, also in these contemporary views pillarization is studied as a macro-historical phenomenon, a synthesis in which the organization of Dutch society is the main focus of historical research.

In this contribution one ordinary life is compared with these general concepts of pillarization. The aim is not to verify or falsify the concept of pillarization, but rather describe the margins to manoeuvre within the pillar itself. Biography is by its own nature capable to express this duality. The main figure in my research on the subject is Adrianus Johannes van Domburg (1895–1983). This Catholic journalist in the Netherlands was the eye witness of a new means of human expression during his life time: cinema.

1 Janus van Domburg (1895–1983) and the Art of Cinema

Janus van Domburg was born on the 9th of January 1895 in Oud en Nieuw Gastel, a village of 6100 inhabitants at that time in the southern and predominantly Catholic province of Noord-Brabant in the Netherlands. His father was a carpenter and ran a furniture shop in the main street of Gastel. When Janus was 12 years old he left home to study at the seminary at Hoogstraten in Belgium. He later went to the seminary in Ypelaar and Bovendonk in Noord-Brabant. Janus was a good student. He was predestined to become a priest.

He became a well-known film critic instead. Van Domburg worked for more than thirty years as a journalist for the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd* (The Time) and he published distinguished essays in Catholic magazines like *De Nieuwe Eeuw* (The New Century) and *De Gemeenschap* (The Community). He left his mark on Dutch film culture in the twentieth century. In general, Dutch cinema has a worldwide highly regarded tradition in documentary film making (Joris

4 Hans Righart, *De katholieke zuil in Europa. Een vergelijkend onderzoek naar het ontstaan van verzuiling in Oostenrijk, Zwitserland, België en Nederland* (Meppel: uitgeverij Boom, 1986).

5 Hans Blom and Jaap Talsma, *De verzuiling voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Het spinhuis, 2000).

Ivens and Bert Haanstra for example), but the feature film has been the poor relation. This was not only a budgetary matter, which has often been proclaimed, but also the outcome of a particular way of thinking about the role and aesthetics of cinema in Dutch society.[6] One of the main spokesmen of that tradition was Janus van Domburg.

In the second half of the 1920s Van Domburg developed an outspoken aesthetics of film, that he adhered to for the rest of his life. Film, he argues in *Levende Schaduwen* (*Living Shadows*), his theoretical reflection on the means of cinema, is not at all a reconstruction or objective representation of reality. Film is an artistic expression 'of the imagination in an invincible form'.[7] It has liberated itself from his uncertain origin as a fairground attraction, when nobody knew what to do with the inventions of Edward Muybridge, Thomas Edison or the Lumière brothers. Ultimately, film was used to present certain things (people, acts, nature, forms) while they were moving. Nothing more.[8]

It was the avant-garde who invented new ways of expression for this new medium that photography or the theatre didn't have. Montage, the rhythm between slow and rapid movement, the distribution between light and dark or the use of the 'Close-Up' (the pseudonym that Van Domburg used in his contributions to *De Nieuwe Eeuw*) truly established the world of cinema as a new form of art. Van Domburg almost preached this gospel in every article bearing his name: a film maker is an artist as long as he is capable to create a world that does not match with his 'naturalistic origin'.[9] The cinematographic possibilities of a director are like the colors on the palette of a painter. Film should be imagination, not a graven image of the world that God created.

It seems that the avant-garde suffered from the rapid technological development of film. The use of sound, color and 'perspective' (Van Domburg foresaw the coming of 3D!) made film such an expensive form of art that the avant-garde could not compete with the commercial products of Hollywood or Elstree. Van Domburg deplored the 'Americanization' of the movie business.

---

6 See for example Gerdin Linthorst, 'Film in Nederland' in: *Ons Erfdeel* 32 (1989), p. 513–520. The best studies about the economics of Dutch cinema are still those of the late film historian Karel Dibbets. Especially K.H.F.M. Dibbets, *Sprekende films: de komst van de geluidsfilm in Nederland 1928–1933* (Amsterdam: Otto Cramwinckel Uitgever, 1993).

7 A.J.P. van Domburg, *Levende schaduwen. Aantekeningen over film* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1936), p. 33.

8 Van Domburg, *Levende schaduwen*, 33. Of course I am talking about the 'zoopraxiscope' of Edward Muybridge, the 'CinemaScope' of Thomas Edison and the 'cinematograph' of the Lumière brothers. Film has different fathers.

9 See for example A. van Domburg, *Walter Ruttmann en het beginsel* (Purmerend: J. Muusses, 1956), p. 16.

The producers wanted a return for their investments in technical novelties and therefore hang on to low risk projects as a musical or comedy.

Van Domburg expressed his disdain for the 'Junk' that was made in Hollywood from the early beginning of his career as a film critic as Close-Up in *De Nieuwe Eeuw*.[10] He despised the vulgar entertainment of the musical comedy with his 'toiling dancing girls, dressed up as monkeys'. That was his review of *Footlight Parade*, a 1933 musical directed by Lloyd Bacon, starring James Cagney and Joan Blondell.[11] Van Domburg didn't fancy James Cagney as a gangster in his bang bang movies either. Actually, he thought that actors and actresses weren't that important at all. They were also 'attributes' in the hands of the director.[12]

According to Van Domburg European cinema stood at a crossroad during the Interbellum. Is cinema a fairground attraction for the masses or a new way of expression for the avant-garde? The idea that there could be room for both was apparently beyond his imagination. Van Domburg shared his view on which direction cinema had to take with the main spokesmen of the so called Filmliga in the Netherlands. This was pretty remarkable. The essayist Menno ter Braak was a liberal and self-proclaimed atheist, the movie director Joris Ivens a convinced communist. Filmliga started in 1927 to show the communist masterpiece *Mother* by Vsevolod Pudovkin. Some local authorities had forbidden the projection of this movie in their cinemas.

There are quite a few similarities between the theoretical reflections on the art of cinema of Menno ter Braak and Janus van Domburg, despite their different views on religion and society. They were both convinced that film should not be a filmed theatre play. They shared a certain anti-Americanism. They loved avant-garde. And they were rather snobbish about the cinematographic preferences of the general public. Ter Braak and Van Domburg admired *Berlin, Symphonie einer Groszstadt* (1927) of Walter Ruttmann. They believed in the concept of 'absolute film' that Ruttmann proclaimed in his movies, which proclaimed the total rejection of narrative elements in film, like literature, theater, or biography.

And they were both in love with Russian Cinema. *Battleship Potemkin* of Sergei Eisenstein was a Revelation for Janus van Domburg. In 1932 he wrote in *Dietsche Warande*, a Catholic literary and cultural magazine in the Nether-

10 Van Domburg was talking about 'Schund', which means rubbish, trash, waste.

11 Adrianus van Domburg, 'Hollywood-Elstree. Verwording en wording', in: *De Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad* April 11, 1934.

12 Van Domburg, *Levende schaduwen*, p. 50.

lands: 'Among the emptiness of American movies, the pathetic rhetorics of the French movie industry and the annoying historical melodramas of the Italians, there were rumors about a flourishing art of cinema in the Soviet Union. And there it was…*Potemkin* crossed our borders.' Van Domburg saw the movie sixteen times. 'Everything we ever dreamed of, composition, montage, sense of detail, rhythm, the unity of form and content, was there in such a masterly manner we never had seen before.'[13]

Soviet cinema was a true source of inspiration for a new generation of Dutch moviemakers, such as Joris Ivens, Mannus Franken and Jan Teunissen. They were the hope for the future. Cinema had the potential in the Netherlands to develop into a recognizable Dutch film school. Janus van Domburg was first of all committed to his Catholic grassroots. He wanted to educate his fellow catholics. The mantra in his articles and lectures was always the same: what distinguished art from kitsch and Quality from Junk?

Van Domburg was a passionate advocate of the Catholic movie in the Netherlands during the Interbellum. A truly Catholic film was so much more than a movie about the missionaries in Africa and their conversion of the non-believers. He was not committed to the so called 'Tendenzfilm' in which an educational lesson was presented in a moralistic way. A truly Catholic film had to deal with 'the inner life of Catholics, the struggle between right and wrong, good and evil, just and unjust, the recognition and acceptance of contemporary life, the daily struggle of people here and now, people of flesh and blood, who are committed to eternity'.[14] In his view only one movie can be considered as 'Catholic' in the true meaning of the word: *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* of Carl Dreyer. That Dreyer was a Lutheran did not bother him at all in this qualification.[15]

During his career as a Catholic film critic Van Domburg clashed with the episcopacy on several occasions. He was convinced that priests should not interfere with film censorship at all. Maybe they were right about the ethics of a movie, but they had no idea about the aesthetics it should reflect. According to Van Domburg the aesthetical aspects of a movie should certainly be taken into consideration by its censor.[16] He was outraged when the Catholic cen-

13 Close-Up (1932), 'De Russische film', in: *Dietsche Warande en Belfort*, 32 (1932), p. 749.

14 Van Domburg, *Levende schaduwen*, p. 87.

15 A. van Domburg, 'La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc. Het leven en sterven van een heilige', in: *De Tijd*, July 27, 1935.

16 Pim Slot, 'Janus van Domburg (1895–1985). Filmpaus in Nederland', in: *Jaarboek mediageschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Stichting Beheer IISG/Stichting Mediageschiedenis, 1995), p. 98–111.

sorship approved *The Sign of the Cross* of Cecil B. DeMille in 1933. This epic movie, settled during the reign of emperor Nero, shows the slaughter of the first Christians in the arena of Rome in a very graphic manner. Van Domburg wrote a crushing review in *De Nieuwe Eeuw*. Cecil B. DeMille did not care about the religious impact of his movie at all. His true intentions were unveiled with the bosom of Claudette Colbert during her bathing scene as empress Poppaea. The Catholic Film Central (KFC), responsible for classifying movies for Catholics in the Netherlands, were deceived by the so called edifying intentions of Cecil B. DeMille. J.Th. Welter, a priest and a board member of the KFC, accused Van Domburg in a Dutch newspaper for being holier than the Pope.[17] Van Domburg treasured this condemnation as a compliment. He wore it as a batch of honor: 'Film-Pope of the Netherlands'.

How ambivalent Van Domburg was in his ethical reviews as a film critic shows his appreciation for *Ever in my heart* of Archie Mayo. This movie was shown in the Netherlands and the Dutch colonies in the winter of 1934. The tragic story of a couple that can't handle the pressure of their community during the Great War (the husband, played by Otto Kruger, is a German living in the USA) shows a double 'forced death' at the end of this *film noir* – a murder and a suicide. Van Domburg was impressed by Mayo's handling of the tragic consequences of his story, although the moral impact of the movie was totally unacceptable for a member of the Catholic church. Van Domburg was convinced that his co-religionists could accept the 'tragedy of life' that Mayo wanted to express in his movie by the strength of their faith.[18]

In 1933 Van Domburg and some comrades-in-arms created *Filmfront*, a Catholic film magazine in which he could further express his ideas about Catholic film. He also tried to create a work environment for Jan Hin, a Catholic filmmaker and student of Joris Ivens. Van Domburg emphasized the importance of film distribution for his fellow moviegoers. Finally, the film critic had to educate the audience about the true artistic values of a quality movie. Production, distribution, criticism – that was the Holy Trinity according to Janus van Domburg.[19]

After the Second World War Van Domburg recognized his ideas about an autonomous film in the work of Herman ter Horst and Bert Haanstra. Meanwhile there was a new generation of film makers who rejected his formal

17 J.Th. Welter, 'Katholieke filmkeuring. Papieren bliksems van een filmpausje. Oplossing van meeningsverschillen', in: *Limburger koerier: provinciaal dagblad* January 28, 1933.

18 A. van Domburg, '"Ever in my heart". Een film van Archie Mayo', in: *De Tijd* February 7, 1934.

19 Domburg, *Levende schaduwen*, p. 86.

principles as being too rigid. These youngsters embraced in *Skoop*, their film magazine, the principles of the Nouvelle Vague. They thought that Jean-Luc Godard was a genius and that *À Bout de Souffle* was the new gospel of modern film making.[20] According to Van Domburg Jean-Luc Godard was a charlatan.[21]

Dutch directors like Wim Verstappen and Pim de la Parra embraced the dramatic opportunities of cinema. They wanted to reach a broader audience with their commercial films and they did not shy away for a great amount of sex in their scenery. The Dutch public saw for the first time a man with an erection in *Blue Movie* by Pim de la Parra (1971) – which was intended to be a regular movie, not pornography. Two years later Paul Verhoeven made the most successful Dutch film ever: *Turkish Delight*, starring Rutger Hauer and Monique van der Ven, with a lot of explicit love scenes.

It wasn't the kind of movies Janus van Domburg liked. When he died on June 21th 1983 the newspapers remembered him as a difficult man, the film pope of the Netherlands, and an advocate of the arthouse movie of the Soviet Union. Still, he was also the man who professionalized film criticism. Van Domburg made it perfectly clear that a review wasn't the extension of a movie commercial but a serious attempt to interpret film as a piece of art. He had only one message: when it wasn't art, it was rubbish.[22]

2 Pillarization, a Love and Hate Story

What to think of this Catholic film critic who praised the beauty and passion of Soviet Cinema, and who stimulated his Catholic readers to watch Marxist-Leninist masterpieces like *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eistenstein or *Mother* by Vsevolod Pudovkin? How can we link this Catholic praise for the Red Comrades and their epic movies with our vision on pillarization? Where does a journalist like Janus van Domburg fit in this picture of a society that was strictly divided, who embraced essentialism and feared diversity? Did not Catholics, Protestants, Social Democrats and Liberals had their own newspapers, broadcast companies, labour-unions, so that they did not need to interfere with each other? And was it not until the 1960s that this small-minded mentality was surmounted? Or is Van Domburg an example of the

20 Nikolai van der Heyde (1963), 'De kritiek is ziek', in: *Skoop* 1(1963)1, p. 8–12.

21 Dbg [= Janus van Domburg], '"A double tour". Zoveel kitsch, zoveel talent', in: *De Tijd: Maasbode* June 7, 1961.

22 'Criticus Dagblad De Tijd overleden. "Filmpaus" Van Domburg propageerde filmkunst', *de Volkskrant* June 22, 1983.

cultural cross-pollination that took place long before the Sixties in Dutch society? When Van Domburg started as a film critic, cinema was a rather new phenomenon. He did not share his religion with the members of the Filmliga, but he certainly shared their views on film. To what extent are these critics responsible for the change of course that the history of Dutch cinema has taken in the Twentieth century? Is it a coincidence that we have a Dutch documentary school, known around the world, while an international appreciation of Dutch feature film is almost absent?[23]

In an article for the *Journal for Media History* Antoon van den Braembussche proclaimed that biography has the ability to question classical concepts of pillarization. The history of pillarization has often been studied as a history of institutions. What about the 'subjective dimension' in that history, 'the intentions and existential backgrounds of the most important decision makers?' Biography will broaden our sense for the 'couleur locale', the specific historical context and the inner life' of the main actors.[24]

And it would open our eyes for conflicts and discussions within the pillars itself. In 2000 Paul Luykx published a truly inspiring study in which he questions the so called docility of the Catholics in the Netherlands during the era of pillarization.[25] The discourse of pillarization has often been described as an emancipation process of the Catholic minority in the Netherlands. In short, the Catholics became a minority during the Dutch Revolt against the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. In 1853 they witnessed the reestablishment of the episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands by the liberal government of Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. Since then the Catholics tried to free themselves from political, social and religious restrictions imposed by the protestant majority.

Luykx does not believe that this discourse is an adequate explanation for the existence of pillarization. In his view, it is a strategy of the episcopacy to deal with the modernization and industrialization of Dutch society beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Church Leaders feared the consequences of this rapid change of society, especially secularization and apostasy. Modern times were a threat for the inner life and identity of Catholics, that's why they had to organize themselves. According to historian Peter

23 As of 1947, there were only three Dutch feature films that won an Oscar. The Italians won 14 Oscars, the French 12.

24 Antoon van den Braembussche, 'Biografie en mediageschiedenis', in: *Jaarboek mediageschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Stichting Beheer IISG/Stichting Mediageschiedenis, 1995), p. 14.

25 Paul Luykx, *Andere katholieken. Opstellen over Nederlandse katholieken in de twintigste eeuw* (Nijmegen: SUN, 2000).

van Dam secularization is not an inevitable outcome of modernization.[26] The Bishops were unambiguously in their Episcopal Charge of 1954: 'United in our own community, cooperative with others, but with preservation of our own identity.' A re-establishment of pillarization after the Second World in full strength.

The question is, however, to what extend the Catholics complied with this propagated self-imposed isolation. Pillarization has been studied as a sociological phenomenon, and as an institutionalized form of history (youth movement, education, labor movement, and so on). But according to Paul Luykx there is a gap in our knowledge. 'It has seldom been questioned how all those concerned, leaders and followers, felt under this group isolation with this strict identity and ideology and the imposed idealism from the biographical point of view.'[27]

The Catholic newspapers in the Netherlands, for example, didn't follow 'Rome' in a submissive manner at all. After the taxes on newspapers and advertisements had been abrogated in 1869, the episcopacy did not interfere with the daily press in any way.[28] As long as Catholic journalists could withstand the 'liberal temptations' of modern times, the bishops were moderate in their censorship. This attitude changed in the nineties of the nineteenth century. At that time universal suffrage became a broadly based discussion in the public arena. The Daily Catholic Press could no longer ignore the democratic reform of Dutch society. Nonetheless, the Dutch Episcopacy declared that Catholic journalists should not participate in 'useless quarrels'. The Bishops feared that the unity of the mother church was at stake. But even then they still not have the ambition to control the actual content of their newspapers. The Censor of the Episcopacy, who had often been consulted at the request of a chief editor, was first of all to bestow a 'Catholic label' on a newspaper, not to write his content. Certain issues have been investigated after ethical concerns were raised about the content of a newspaper, not beforehand.[29]

As we have seen, Van Domburg did not hesitate to begin a good quarrel with the leading clergy of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands. But that

26 An example of this view are the United States. But that does not say anything about the collective fear of the Catholic leaders for the dissolving consequences of this modernization process. See especially Peter van Dam, 'Een wankel vertoog: over ontzuiling als karikatuur', in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis van Nederland* 126 (2011), p. 52–77.

27 Luykx, *Andere katholieken*, p. 134.

28 Luykx, *Andere katholieken*, p. 154.

29 Luykx, *Andere katholieken*, p. 158.

was exactly what it was: a discussion, plurality, a process of opinion-forming. Not a ban, deny of the sacraments, demonization, or excommunication.

The 'other Catholics' of which Paul Luykx is talking about are rebellious people who try to strengthen their own identity within the borders of the Mother Church. Janus van Domburg grew up with future priests and bishops in the seminaries that he visited as a child and a young man. He was not willing to obey them blindly, since he was once their equal.

Actually, Janus van Domburg was part of a generation that stood rather hostile against the clergy. Jan Schaepman wrote a declaration of principles in the first issue of *De Valbijl* (The Falling Ax), a Catholic magazine for youngsters. 'There are many priests who think that they are the yardstick for the True Believers, because they see themselves as servants of the Truth. We Catholics have the right to dispose this erroneous Catholicism.'[30] The youngsters were not impressed by their politicians either. After Herman Schaepman died in 1903, who had been the frontrunner of the Catholic emancipation in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a certain lack of inspiring figures at the top of the RKSP, the Catholic political party of the Netherlands at that time. There was a common belief that parliamentary democracy could not fulfill their needs at all. Some of the youngsters choose ultimately the road to fascism in the 1930s.[31]

At the start of his career, film was rather a new form of expression, but the ideas about visual culture were as old as Christianity itself. 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth', says Exodus 20:4. Jawhe is a jealous God and does not like the competition of a 'Divine Greta Garbo'. Of course, it is pure speculation to assume that Van Domburgs disgust of the 'naturalistic movie' had to do with his innermost Christian beliefs. But there is more that points in that direction.

The generation of Janus van Domburg was deeply inspired by French Catholic philosophers like Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain. The main work of Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), has been translated in Dutch in 1924

30 Quoted by Anton van Duinkerken, *De beweging der jongeren* (Hilversum: Paul Brand, 1933), p. 38.

31 Main spokesman of this sentiment was Anton van Duinkerken, a pseudonym of Wilhelmus Johannes Maria Antonius Asselbergs (1903–1968). See especially Anton van Duinkerken, *De beweging der jongeren* (Hilversum: Paul Brand, 1933). Van Duinkerken became an outspoken antifascist in the 1930s. Van Duinkerken and Van Domburg were good friends. It was Van Domburg who insisted to publish his flaming protest against Anton Mussert, leader of the National socialists in the Netherlands, the poem: 'Ballad of a Catholic'.

by Cas Terburg, a Dominican priest. (Of course, Van Domburg did not need this translation, he read and spoke French perfectly well. That was one of the benefits of an education at the seminars). Maritain argues that God is Absolute Beauty and that the artist is committed to express His divinity in his work. According to Maritain, the bond between art and divinity has been broken with the introduction of realism during the Renaissance. 'With the sixteenth century the lie installed itself in painting, which began to love science for its own sake, endeavoring to give the illusion of nature and to make us believe that in the presence of a painting we are in the presence of the scene or the subject painted, not in the presence of a painting.'[32] A true artist does not care about the accuracy of his image. Rhythm, sound, color, form, volume, words, metre, rime and image are not entities by themselves but building blocks to worship God's creation in a work of art. 'What is required is not that the representation exactly conforms to a given reality, but that through the material elements of the beauty of the work there truly pass, sovereign and whole, the radiance of a form, and therefore of *a truth*.'[33] That is the *Splendor veri* the Platonic philosophers are talking about, the Beauty of Truth.

Anyhow, it's biography that enables us to study and describe the nuances of an individual life within 'the big picture', to stay in cinematographic terms, of an historical construction such as pillarization. Van Domburg was a very Catholic film critic for a very Catholic newspaper in the era of a very Catholic pillarization of Dutch society, but he was not a docile and humble servant of the Dutch episcopacy or the papacy in Rome. He did not fear 'contamination' of his left wing or atheist colleagues in film criticism. He encouraged his fellow catholics to enjoy the masterpieces of Soviet cinema, and to watch film noir movies that did not match with their ethical beliefs. He even quarreled openly with board members of the Catholic censorship, mostly priests, for their lack of taste in good movies. Still, Van Domburg did not rebel against the system of pillarization itself. The episcopacy respected his views and criticism within the margins of the community of their Holy Mother Church. He wasn't expelled. Maybe there is a gray area between falsification and verification. And maybe biography has the potentiality to function as a go-between of historical truth.

32 Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*. I am using the translation of Joseph W. Evans. See https://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/art.htm.

33 Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*.

History That Addresses Biography: Ethics and the Vatican

Hans Renders

Popes, like American presidents are a wonderful subject for the comparative study of Biography.[1] Every pope has a whole range of biographies, movies, television series and novels. Like one can build a cathedral of all the American presidential biographies. And probably there are more Bio Pics of Popes than of Presidents. All those Pope biographies give us the possibility to say something about Ethics in Biography, about the ethics of the biographer. Not only because I didn't like all those crap movies of Popes, especially about the so called Female Pope Johanna (she never existed although many movies are made about her life, certainly since Liv Ullmann played in 1972 the role of Johanna) but more because I understood more than ever the urge of ethics of doing biography, or in print or on celluloid.

The question of what is wrong and right takes us right to the heart of ethics. Almost every occupational group has a code of ethics that dictates what is allowed, and what is not. Central to ethics is the question of what is the correct way to handle in concrete situations. Aristotle, founder of the term ethics, argued that practical questions form a starting point for developing morality, which is a reflection of a society's or occupational group's norms and values.

Which occupational group does the biographer belong to? A biographer is an artist under oath. He is not allowed to make up facts, has to do his archival research as adequately as possible, and, like any author, cannot plagiarize other authors' texts. Biography is a genre that can be found somewhere between journalism and history; two occupational groups that have no legal occupational protection, but follow their professional codes are the more for this lack. For the historian, this means he has to handle his sources responsibly, and has to be unbiased. The journalist is expected to honor the custom of double-checking his sources and searching for counter opinions. Being unbiased is an important attribute of both biographers and journalists. Being open-minded and having a benevolent attitude towards your subject results

1 An earlier version of this text is submitted as a lecture in French, in Aix-en-Provence on October 17, 2017. See Hans Renders, 'L'éthique et le Vatican. Le Biographie sous serment professionnel', in: *La Vérité d'une vie. Études sur la veridiction en biographie*, Joanny Moulin, Nguyen Phuong Ngoc et Yannick Gouchan (ed.), Honoré Champion, Paris 2019, p. 35–44.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_010

in the fact that biographers tend to shy away from ideology. The biographer should refrain from hero worship. When reading a Karl Marx biography, readers should not be able to tell if the biographer is or is not a Marxist.

The biographer has nothing to defend, except his reputation as biographer. This sounds all logic, but the practice is barbarous, certainly for former Pope biographers. It was the French historien Jacques Le Goff who explained why the church and the university are the oldest institutions that have survived until now: because they are not thinking in years but in ages.

The statement of Le Goff can be illustrated by the process against Galileo Galilei, the scientist who was banned by the Vatican because he stated in the early seventeenth century (like Copernicus early sixteenth century) that the sun is the center of the universe and not the earth. The procedural documents were lost for ages in the unmeasuarable archive of the Vatican. Probably that was not on purpose, but soon after Galilei was convicted because of his theses, the Holy See acknowledged that the earth actually did revolve around the sun, instead of the opposite. It lasted until 1992 before this papal error was admitted and Johannes Paulus II apologized for it. The practice had adjusted to the idea (ideology) until 350 years after Galilei's death.

The fact is that ethics and ideology are flexible concepts.

An example of how an idea can adjust the practice is the biography of the so-called purifier of the Vatican, Pope Adrian VI. The Pope represents the heir of the Apostle Peter, the Divine Power on Earth. Since the first century until now we had 308 popes, including the 'Anti Popes' from Rome, Pisa and Avignon. One of them was Adriaan Floriszoon Boeyens (1459–1523), also known as Adrian of Utrecht or Hadrian VI, Adrianus VI and Adrian VI. It's amazing that time and again new biographies of Adrian VI are being published, while he was pope for only 19 months - in theory at least, in reality only one year.[2] One of those biographies is written by Michel Verweij in 2011, published as *The tragic pope from the Netherlands*. How tragic was Adrian VI? Not at all, claims Twan Geurts in another biography of Adrian, in 2017.[3]

A biopic of Adrian was never made. I'm not surprised because only a few (if any) Popes have been interpreted so differently as Adrian. The decor of such a movie, I mean both the physical and the contextual decor, could be destilled

2 Among others: Gerard Morinck, *Vita Hadriani Sexti Pontificis Maximi*, Lovanij, Ex Officina Rutgeri Rescij, 1536; Michel Verweij, *Adrianus VI (1459–1523). De tragische paus uit de Nederlanden*, Garant, Antwerpen/Apeldoorn 2011; Karl-Heinz Ducke, *Handeln zum Heil. Eine Untersuchung zur Morrallehre Hadrianus VI*, Leipzig 1976; Ludwig Freiherr Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste im Zeitalter der Renaissance und der Glaubenspaltung*, second part: *Adrian VI. Und Klemens VII*, second vol.: *Adrian VI., der letste deutsche Papst (1522–1523)*.

3 Twan Geurts, *De Nederlandse paus Adrianus van Utrecht 1459–1523*, Balans, Amsterdam 2017.

out of his biographies and other literature concerning popes, but the intrigue is in the interpretation and which one is chosen by the director?

In his handbook *Keepers of the Key of Heaven. A history of the Papacy* of 2009, the British medievalist Roger Collins describes how in 1513 the first Florentine pope was elected, Giovanni De Medici, who chose as Pope name Leo X.[4] 'His successor was Clemens VII (1523–1534), during the fiercely contested conclave following the brief pontificate of Adrian VI (1522–1523).' That was all! Apart from another mention in a summary of names, Adrian is just overlooked by Collins.

In the historiography, a caricature has been made of Adrian: the barbarian, the miser, the art-hater and the stranger.[5] Birgit Emich, a German professor in history, has an explanation for this image. Adrianus VI was a victim of the propaganda exerted by the Medici, the Italian humanist family that was full of prejudice and arrogance against humanism in Northern Europe. Adrian was not the only victim of this arrogance. The lawsuit against the Fleming Christophe de Longueil can serve as an example of this attitude between Romans and not-Romans. He was accused only of 'Romanitas laesa', of an insult to the Greatness of Rome.

Adrian wanted to unify Christianity, to battle Luther's Reformation and to reform the Church. He was not successful in these aims because he died 19 months after the start of his papacy. In fact his reign lasted not even a year, because it took 8 months before he actually took over the Holy See. The pope before him (Leo X) and after him (Clemens VII) were, as said, both from the De Medici family. They flaunted their power, showed it by splendor and beauty. Adrian was a puritan.

Before Adian arrived in Rome the famous Pasquinades, satyric pamphlets, were distributed in the streets of Rome. Famous satirists like Pietro Aretino and Francesco Berni and even Giorgio Vasari wrote negative about Adrian. Vasari, in his famous *Lives of the Artists* (published in 1550) saw Adrian as a man 'who took no delight in painting or sculpture or in any other good thing'.[6] Indeed a barbarian. Interesting to know that the Florentine chauvinist Vasari worked for pope Clemens VII.

In fact Adrian loved art, which can be illustrated by the paintings made in his assignment and also because he bought back the gobelins that were

4 Roger Collins, *Keepers of the Keys of Heaven. A History of the Papacy*, London, Phoenix, 2009.

5 Birgit Emich, 'Een vreemdeling aan de macht. De Nederlandse paus Adrianus VI (1522–1523)', in: Frans Willem Lantink and Jeroen Koch (eds.), *De paus en de wereld. Geschiedenis van een instituut* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), p. 173–189, 413–419.

6 Giorgio Vasari. *Lives of the Artists*, translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, p. 361. The first edition is published in 1550, the augmented edition in 1568.

made by Raphael and pledged by the college of Cardinals. Ok, Michelangelo left Rome after the election of Adrian. Like so many others, but not because of Adrian but because the Plague broke out.

Adrian was not a cardinal from the north of the Alps, as is often stated, when he was elected in January 1522, because he then had been living for six years in Spain, where he was translated as bishop of Tortosa but also as great inquisitor-general of Spain, of Castilia and Leon.

To show Adrian was not a tragic figure at all, Geurts stresses in his biography the relationship between Erasmus and Adrian before he was Pope, when he was working as the provost of the Leuven University in Belgium and as a cardinal. Geurts pays attention to Adrian's life before he became pope. That's interesting, because Boeyens was a very wise and cosmopolitan man. Born in Utrecht, he climbed to a position as full professor and provost from the University of Leuven, until he was appointed as the teacher of Charles V. When Charles was crowned as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Adrian became Great Inquisitor and regent of Spain.

When he was elected as Pope, it was chaos in the church. Consecutive popes behaved themselves rather as power-loving fieldmen than as caretakers of the soul, cardinals lived openly with their mistresses, Alexander VI (known by the beautiful interpretation by Jeremy Popkin in the television series *The Borgias*) even had eight children at three different women. The burlesque life in the Vatican was financed by selling indulgences. These were 'certificates' produced in bulk that had been pre-signed by the pope. They pardoned a person's sins and gave you access to heaven. The scam in these indulgences was an abomination in the eyes of the German theologian Martin Luther. In 1517 he nailed his famous propositions to the church doors of Wittenberg, the beginning of the Reformation and of protestantism. At the other side of Europe the armies of the Muslim leader Sultan Süleyman the Great advanced to conquer the christian world.

Immediately after he took the Holy See, Adrian announced a series of measures: cardinals were no longer allowed to carry weapons, they had to shave their beards and a whole range of expensive artists and others who lead a luxurious life at the expense of the curia, were fired. His predessor Leo X employed almost 100 footmen, whereas Adrian only four! The reforms of the pope gave him the name of barbarian who detested the sophisticated manners of Italy. This criticism came mainly from the rich De Medici family.

Adrian called for help from his compatriot Erasmus. Being the most famous intellectual of Europe in his days, he criticized the church but not as radical as Luther. Now something strange. Erasmus was not only the most famous intellecual of Europe, he was also a friend of Thomas More and he was respec-

ted in the Vatican as well. The famous Dutch historian Johan Huizinga payed in his biography of Erasmus, published in 1924, a lot of attention to the contact between Adrian and Erasmus.[7] But still you can find hardly any role for Erasmus in the literature about Adrian, except for Dutch historiography. The Dutch biography of Michel Verweij confirms the cliché that Adrian was a tragic figure, seen from the Roman Curia perspective, but not in reality.[8] Verweij quotes extensively the correspondence between Adrianus and Erasmus. But John Julius Norwich in *The Popes. A History* (2011) doesn't mention Erasmus at all in relation with Adianus.[9] That's odd.

In many foreign biographical portraits of Adrian, the intensive contact, illustrated by letters, between Adrian and Erasmus is hardly mentioned. Even Italian humanists couldn't deny the fact that Erasmus was an important humanist, widely considered to have been the greatest scholar of the northern Renaissance. Thus, the collaboration between Adrian and Erasmus didn't fit into the image of the Barbarian.

Is it Laziness, Ignorance or Ideology to neglect a pope from 'north of the Alpes', to make him so little and unimportant in the history of the Papacy? It would last until 1978, before another foreign pope, the Polish Johannes Paulus II, took the Holy See.

The biographer wants to write a true and clearly accountable story, but a well-written story is just as important. According to some, every story structure chosen by a biographer should be considered as an ethical choice. Others consider biography, whatever its story structure, to be the act of 'stealing' the lives of others. Academics all too often compare the biographer to the magpie that steals shining jewels from a serious field of research, and leaves the boring material to others. Even if this way of looking at biographers is correct, these academics should remember that they made the decision to work with this 'boring material' themselves. However, the position that any narrative choice is an ethical choice relies upon the seldomly mentioned argument that knowledge of the intimate life can be of importance to the bigger history.

The question to what extent the biographer should work from a system of norms and values, or morality, is related to the discussion on posthumous privacy. Is a biographer allowed to tarnish someone's posthumous reputation? Elaborate articles have been written to assert that this is not allowed. Someone who cannot defend himself – and the dead do not have lawyers – cannot be

7 Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1924).

8 Michel Verweij, *Adrianus VI (1459–1523). De tragische paus uit de Nederlanden* (Antwerpen/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2011).

9 John Julius Norwich, *The Popes. A History* (London: Vintage, 2011).

vilified; even his private life should not be tampered with. What to do with 'rumours' that are demonstrably incorrect, but that have influenced someone's reputation? In the biographies of Chester Arthur (US President from 1881 until 1885) and Barack Obama, the biographers rightly mention the rumours that they were not born in the US, which would make them illegal presidents. These rumours played their parts in the social-political debates, which make them relevant for a biographer.

Dutch biographer Elsbeth Etty is very clear on posthumous privacy: 'The dead do not require privacy protection. Let us stop making excuses for concealing intimate facts of life and keep on searching for ways to track down these facts, and give them their indispensable place in life stories in responsible, reliable ways.' The Belgian historian Antoon De Baets, however, disagrees: 'The position that the dead have no privacy or reputation is defensible on its own, and on a strictly judicial ground. Because the dead are not people, they do not possess human dignity, and therefore do not require rights such as privacy or reputation. But because they are *former* people, they do possess *posthumous* dignity'.[10]

In 1994, the French historian Emmanuel Chadeau heard a judge decide that he had done a meticulous job in his biography of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944), even when he suggested the possibility that the author and pilot, who disappeared mysteriously, did not die during a nightly flight accident, but had in fact committed suicide. During the court case, which was brought on by De Saint-Exupéry's grieving heirs, the judge did reprimand Chadeau for illegally spreading unpublished material on De Saint-Exupéry. The heirs could claim a moral right to this material, according to the judge.[11] That is a difficult conclusion for biographers. Countless examples exist of Jewish relatives of holocaust victims that do not wish to hear their loved ones' names recited during public memorial services, or see their names in (digital) memorial archives. Naturally, they have every right to think so, but a biographer has an ethical responsibility to both his own professionality and the truth. The biographer's ethics is always closely connected to the way he handles his sources, even though there will always be people who take issue with that. The paradox is that when a judge forbids the use of certain sources, these incriminated sources will garner extensive media coverage. An American judge in the 1960s forced the historian Francis Russell to delete certain quotations in his biography, which he had found in love letters that he had discovered and that

10 'E is for Ethics', in: Nigel Hamilton & Hans Renders, *The ABC of Modern Biography* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2018), p. 41–50.

11 'E if for Ethics, p. 41–50.

had been sent by President Warren Harding (1865–1923) to his lover. Harding's family asserted they would feel 'damaged beyond repair' if passages from these letters, which had been written before he took on the presidency, would be published. For all that, the family was not able to prevent the media from extensively covering passages from several of these letters.

The biographer is often depicted as an unreliable character in novels, similar to the countless novels and feature films in which the journalist is portrayed as unreliable. This can be seen in Henry James' novel *The Aspern Papers*, where the narrator is prepared to seduce a niece of Juliana Borderea, who may or may not possess letters from the celebrated poet Jeffrey Aspern. This in itself is unethical, but the fact that he presents himself to the old woman as a prospective lodger makes the whole situation unworthy of a biographer. Even worse is the biographer in the novel *Le marchand de masques* by Henri Troyat. After he hands in his manuscript, he discovers a letter which reveals the fact that his main witnesses have been lying to him. That letter is the only proof of his biography's inconsistency. He rips up the letter and flushes the shreds through the toilet. Needless to say this is a deadly sin for the professional biographer. It's only cheap, not a sin to retell in every biography and biopic of the female Pope Johanna to recall the story that her successor Benedictus III gave order to produce a *chaise percée*, a chair with a hole in it. He wanted every new pope to take place on it so that the youngest cardinal with his hand under the seat of the chair could shout the liberating: 'He has testicles!'

Some biographers chose for sensation in the most mysterical story of modern papacy – the death of Paulus I in 1978 after 33 days of pontificate. This modest and wise Pope was indeed about to reveal and international bank scandal. The Curia spread some lies concerning the death of the 67-year young Paul, who was as far as we know a very healthy Italian.

The psychiatrist's code of professional conduct says: 'Do no harm'. This is an important starting point for most occupational groups, but it would be quite a weird adage for the biographer. News that 'harms' somebody appears daily. Both biographers and journalists enjoy freedom of newsgathering. Edward Hoover's family is probably not pleased to hear his biographer's news that Hoover, who had been director of the FBI under seven US presidents, was gay. Still, mentioning this fact is important, because Hoover was famous for pressurizing other politicians with their alleged homosexuality. Rumours that Hoover was a transvestite who enjoyed gay sex orgies were proven to be facts in 1993, with the appearance of Anthony Summers' *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*.

One of the most difficult ethical issues in relation to privacy revolves around the question how long a certain discretion should persist. Would a letter from Julius Caesar that reveals him as being a paedophile lead to a great fuss in the

public domain? It probably would, but not because his privacy would have been violated by the publication of the letter. Paula Broadwell, co-author of a biography of retired but still living four-star general David Petraeus, then Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), brings up an interesting question: 'How close can a biographer get to his subject?' She must have thought about this as she began to have intimate relations with him. On the biography's cover shone a second name: that of her co-author Vernon Loeb. When the 'Broadwell scandal' reached its peak, he published an article in *The Washington Post*, in which he declared he was only the ghost writer of this biography, which he felt did not deserve to be called a biography. If there ever were to be an ethical code of conduct (God forbid), it would be wise to include the following: choose a subject that has already passed away. Preferably over ten years ago, and on an average age. Furthermore, let the biographer be someone who does not wish to either debunk or worship his subject.

What to do with biographers of mass murderers and dictators? Can we apply the 'Do no harm' adage on those? Thankfully, biographers of Hitler and Stalin are not given the cold shoulder, and people understand that understanding someone is not the same as empathizing with someone. You could argue that every biography arouses some sense of compassion for the person described. Some degree of empathy is necessary for understanding another person, or, as Richard Holmes puts it: 'Biography is a handshake'. But this has nothing to do with condoning another person's actions.

How close is too close? Doris Kearns Goodwin wrote a remarkably positive biography of President Lyndon Johnson while he was still alive. It was so positive that reviewers suggested that there might have been more at play than only a strict business relationship between biographer and biographee. Goodwin has always asserted that her relationship with Johnson was not sexual, and that 'she sat in a chair while he unburdened himself from her bed'. In 2002 Goodwin had to retire from the Pulitzer Prize jury, because she was accused of plagiarism in her book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* from 1988. She acknowledged to *The New York Times* that her publisher, Simon & Schuster, reached a private settlement in 1987 with another author over accusations of plagiarism, agreeing to a payment and the addition of footnotes to the text. Reaching a settlement is a form of admitting guilt. And she had every reason for that: she turned out to have copied extensively from other biographies. Lynne McTaggart even alleged Goodwin had stolen one third of her book *Kathleen Kennedy: Her Life and Times*.[12] Goodwin, however, thought differently about this: she had only forgotten to reference to these other biographies. Bad memory gives good conscience.

12 'E is for Ethics', p. 41–50.

Brief Lives: A Microhistorical Approach

David T. Roth

In this paper I apply some microhistorical techniques to bring to light the forgotten or obscured histories of the transient lives of asylum patients in Sydney. The term 'normal exception' firmly applies to the patients discussed in this paper. These apparently unusual and exceptional cases in the asylum reveal, when examined closely, a hidden reality of routine practices which could be considered questionable by the standards of the period. Here I speak of the alcoholic who died on his first day in the mental health system and patients who were made tractable by the threat of force-feeding or electrical devices. Reducing the scale to the individual patient brings into sharp focus the hidden dark side of the putatively benevolent policy of moral management as practised at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane in Sydney.

Microhistory asks 'large questions in small places'.[1] It is characterised by the tiny scale of its research, focusing on individuals, events, or small groups. Paradigm, ground-breaking studies of this kind have been G.R. Stewart's *Pickett's Charge* (first published 1959), Carlo Ginzburg's *Cheese and the Worms* (1976) and Robert Darnton's compilation of essays, the *Great Cat Massacre* (1984).[2] Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize winning 1927 novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, might be thought of as a fictional predecessor.[3] Generally speaking, microhistorical studies tend to focus on the lower social strata: *The Cheese and the Worms* deals with the persecution and execution of a humble, though well-read miller, Mennochio; the eponymous essay in the *Great Cat Massacre* analyses the motivations for the apparently sadistic actions of oppressed apprentices; and *Pickett's Charge* examines the individual experiences of ordinary men in battle and their leaders – generals Robert E. Lee, 'Pete' Longstreet and George Pickett. These Confederate leaders, exceptionally for a microhistory

1 C.W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), p. 1.

2 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009); G.R. Stewart, *Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).

3 Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927).

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_011

study, were clearly high-status individuals. In the *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Brother Juniper, a Franciscan monk, investigates in enormous detail the lives of the victims of a (fictional) bridge disaster, trying to determine if they merited their fate.[4] One of the dead, Doña María, is a wealthy noblewoman, the others of much humbler origin. In the end, Brother Juniper's cosmic question remains unanswered.

Ginzburg and his colleague, Carlo Poni, show that: 'a really exceptional document, a marginal case can reveal a hidden reality, when the sources are silent about the lower social strata, or when they systematically distort their social reality'.[5] The fundamental unit of analysis for microhistorians is the individual. In this essay I apply some microhistorical techniques to bring to light the forgotten or obscured histories of the transient lives of asylum patients in Sydney at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane and its 'feeder' institution, the Reception House. Their treatment exposes the hidden reality of some everyday medical practices which have remained generally unknown to the wider public to the present day.

Microhistorians use the term 'normal exception'. The lives of marginalised people, such as prisoners or mental patients, are regarded as 'obscure and strange', yet they are normal and typical in their own environment.[6] For Ginzburg and Eduardo Grendi, individual cases that might be thought to be unusual or exceptional, become, when examined closely, perceived as typical.[7]

My current research analyses mortality and discharges at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane over a roughly 40-year period, from 1877 to 1923. The

4 Brother Juniper, who witnesses the (fictional) collapse of the bridge in 1714 inquires at great length into the lives of the victims, seeking an answer into why they had to die. Finding no answer, he destroys his work except for one copy, which lies neglected in a university library. He is then burned for heresy. Juniper's namesake, the first Franciscan brother, was one of the original followers of St Francis of Assisi. See Madeleine L'Engle and W. Heywood, *The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi* (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classic, 1998).

5 C. Ginzburg and C. Poni 'Il nome et il come: Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico', trans. E. Branch (first published 1979) 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace', *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

6 Hans Renders, 'The Limits of Representativeness', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, *Theoretical discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 132–133.

7 Quoted by Sabina Loriga in Chapter 3, 'The Plurality of the Past', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History*. (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 37. See also Chapter 1, 'Italian Microhistory', in: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013).

length of a patient's stay was typically short. About 70 per cent of patients who died there stayed for a year or less, while roughly the same percentage of discharged patients had a similar length-of-stay. The sources are definitely not silent. I have made extensive use of patient case notes, withheld patient letters and other official and personal material to reinforce and underpin the arguments put forward in my PhD thesis. These sources have enabled me to uncover the hidden reality of institutional life during the period and the lived experiences of patients.

These cases are part of the forgotten history of Australian asylums before 1923 which my research has uncovered. This history has been overlaid in popular memory by persistent fictional stereotypes, folk memories and oral histories of the darker years of the Great Depression and beyond. To this day ghost tours are conducted at the disused and dilapidated buildings at Callan Park.[8] But asylums were not foci of deliberate mistreatment and intentional horror. One principal finding of my research is that asylums at my period had multiple roles: the definition of mental illness was much broader then. Before the advent of more specialised care in the later twentieth century, they provided 'one stop' care; aged care for the demented or misbehaving elderly; nursing for the terminally ill; a hospice for people in the terminal stages of venereal disease; treatment for epileptics; and a 'drying out' refuge for alcoholics. 'Back stop' may be a better term, because asylums and gaols were the only state institutions during the period where admittance to a properly documented person could not be refused. These responsibilities were in addition to the accepted role of mental institutions or clinics as we might recognise them today, caring for people with acute and chronic mental illness.

Another outcome of my study is that there was minimal, if any, management-endorsed deliberate sadism or oppression of patients, contrary to the commercially-orientated representations of the proprietors of ghost tours or sensationalist reporters.[9] Callan Park Hospital for the Insane, whose first patient was admitted in 1877, was designed specifically to implement the then prevailing policy of moral management. This system of care was characterised by therapeutic optimism, deprecating previous regimes of physical restraints, harsh or negligent handling and long-term 'warehousing' – permanent confinement without hope of release. The new policy was intended to provide

8 https://blog.bresicwhitney.com.au/callanpark/ (accessed 25 August 2019).

9 'Sydney's shameful Asylums: The silent Houses of Pain where Inmates were chained and Sadists reigned', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 3 March 2015.

patients with a reassuring, home-like atmosphere, religious counselling, work therapy and regular hours of eating, recreation, and sleeping.[10] At Callan Park and other state asylums, large male and female hospital wards were provided within the institution to care for patients with organic illnesses. My investigation of the life and career of F. Norton Manning, the first New South Wales (NSW) Inspector-General of the Insane from 1876 to 1898, indicates that he was well-respected by his staff and the public, and dedicated to his patients. There is no suggestion, moreover, that his successor, Eric Sinclair (Inspector-General 1898, died in office 1925), although harsher in character, and disingenuous and blustering with outside critics, tolerated deliberately unkind or negligent treatment of patients.

Of course there were individual cases of negligence, incompetence and brutality by staff in the persistently overcrowded and underfunded conditions. According to the annual published reports of the Inspectors-General (the *Reports*), staff who transgressed the strict regulations were promptly dismissed or reprimanded. The dismissal rate per annum of roughly three per cent, and to some extent the resignation rate of twenty per cent, are some evidence for the implementation of these sanctions. Admittedly, the pay was poor, the work demanding and the hours long, although meals and accommodation were subsidised. A number of unsuitable staff were allowed to resign rather than be discharged. Abuses by staff would also have been discouraged by family visits and exchanges of letters, home leave, contacts between patients and public such as outside sports competitions and concerts, and religious counselling.[11] Official Visitors were appointed to audit patient complaints. Newspaper reporters were encouraged to examine the facilities and the patients.[12] These potential checks on abuses were not entirely unmoderated; some complaints to visitors were perhaps stifled by the presence of attendants. Many patient letters were

10 See Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence. Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-keeping, 1840–1883*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Introduction and p. 203.

11 For sports competitions with outside teams, see for example 'Conservative v Callan Park Asylum', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 15 February 1884; 'Burwood District v Callan Park Asylum', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 16 September 1906. For concerts, see for example 'Concert at Callan Park Asylum', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1901. There were paid official positions for Church of England and Catholic chaplains at Callan Park – see for example NSW State Archives and Records, Library Catalogue 1809, 'New South Wales Public Service List 1900', p. 4.

12 'Callan Park. A Great State Institution', *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser* (Sydney), 12 August 1903.

withheld, not necessarily due to criticism of the asylum, and visitors always had to be accompanied by staff.[13]

Notwithstanding these checks and balances, close examination of the lives of some patients reveals practices that management might have preferred to be hidden from the public gaze. Some normal, everyday, practices, such as force-feeding, were never exposed at the time. While there is no evidence that medical superintendents at Callan Park had any intention of harming or abusing patients, the methods they used, while usually well-intended, may have seriously diminished quality-of-life and caused premature death. Some of these practices had been criticised by leading experts of the day, as I will show. My research on mortality at Callan Park shows that diagnoses of the causes of death were often vague and lagged behind the medical standards of the time.[14] Certainly there is also evidence of negligence and slip-shod work. The apparently insouciant and poorly documented use of addictive chemical restraints is one example.[15]

As the *Reports* show, physical restraints, such as strait-jackets and muffs, were not often used and their use deprecated. The official regulations stated that they could not be applied on the say-so of an attendant or nurse. Although both physical and chemical restraints putatively required medical authorisation and documentation, chemical restraints, that is to say sedatives and hypnotics such as opiates and chloral hydrate, were preferred because they saved labour and were less conspicuous to visitors.[16] In practice, attendants and nurses did administer laxatives such as Epsom salts ('whitehouse') without medical permission in order to quieten patients. The historiography has been largely silent on the use and justification of chemical restraints in Australian asylums. The case notes reveal a hidden reality of excessive and often negligent practice. Indeed, the implementation of the prevailing policy of moral management, which deprecated physical restraints, would have been economically impossible without the use of sedatives in the increasingly overcrowded and

13 It appears that all patient letters were censored by a medical officer, so it is possible that abuses by staff might have been discovered by this means. It is not clear to me why some of the surviving patient letters were withheld, as they were not critical of the asylum and appear innocuous.

14 David T. Roth, 'Life, Death and Deliverance at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane, 1877 to 1923' (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, May 2020).

15 David T. Roth, 'Chemical Restraint at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane in Sydney, New South Wales, 1877–1920', in: Health and History 20, no. 1 (August 2018): p. 1–27.

16 For relevant regulations see Government of New South Wales, *Hospitals for the Insane, New South Wales. Rules for Attendants, Nurses and Others* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1918), p. 9–10. For labour economics of chemical restraints, see Roth, 'Chemical Restraint'.

understaffed conditions over my period of interest. As we understand now, the overuse of sedative medications quite probably shortened patients' lives, risked addiction and reduced quality-of-life.[17] This history of pharmaceutical risk is echoed in the current revelations about excessive chemical restraints at the current 2018–2019 Commonwealth Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.[18]

1 Martin D'Arcy – Death on the First Evening

The disabled war veteran Martin D'Arcy can be regarded as a significant 'exception' because he died on his first evening in the mental health system. His death was not statistically representative, but its circumstances revealed a series of troubling normalities. Ginzburg abandoned the notion of statistical representativeness – even if a case was not typical or average, it made possible the testing of latent possibilities.[19] Unlike Ginzburg's Mennochio, D'Arcy left no strange oeuvre about the genesis of the world, and, unlike the apprentices massacring their employers' cats, he had little agency. Yet his death brought the everyday practices of mental health care into the public gaze. D'Arcy probably died due to an adverse drug reaction, a medicine administered by a medically unqualified person.

D'Arcy, a professional violinist before he volunteered to join the Australian Army, had lost an arm in the First World War. Unable to work and depressed, he had, like so many other traumatised war veterans, become an alcoholic.[20] Admitted to the Reception House in October 1922 and diagnosed with 'chronic alcoholic insanity', he died the same night after being given a 'sleeping draught' containing paraldehyde. The Reception House, founded in 1868, was intended to 'filter out' patients with transient or temporary mental disturbance before admission to the hospitals for the insane, thus avoiding the stigma of certification for people with temporary illness and saving the additional costs of

17 David T. Roth, 'Chemical Restraint at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane in Sydney, New South Wales, 1877–1920', *Health and History* 20, no. 1 (August 2018): p. 1–27.

18 The Commission's interim report states: 'A lack of permission in the use of restraint and prolonged use of powerful chemical restraints [in aged care] is common in Australia.' See https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Pages/interim-report.aspx. (Accessed 4 November 2019). The Commission has called for immediate action on this issue.

19 See Loriga, 'The Plurality of the Past', p. 37.

20 Stephen Garton, 'The "Tyranny" of Doctors: The Citizen's Liberty League in New South Wales, 1920–39', *Australian Historical Studies* 24, no. 97 (1991): p. 340–358.

admission to an asylum. D'Arcy would probably have been admitted to Callan Park or the Gladesville asylum, the main metropolitan asylums, if judged insane at the House. In evidence at the Coroner's inquest, the duty Medical Officer at the House, Chisholm Ross, stated that he had attributed D'Arcy's death to 'heart failure' conditional upon subsequent autopsy, although some 'minor' abrasions were observed on his forehead and there were bloodstains on the wall of his room at head height.[21]

D'Arcy's demise and his quick burial might have passed unnoticed by the public, had it not been for the complaint of a voluntary patient, John Warden, to the NSW parliamentarians John Ness and Albert Lane. Warden's complaint was encouraged by John White, an attendant. Warden claimed that a trustee patient and de facto maintenance worker, Gustav Kries, who had keys to all the rooms, had gone to D'Arcy's room and beaten him to death.[22] At the subsequent inquest, it was revealed that Warden had a history of conflict with Kries. White also had a grudge, because Kries had reported his affair with a nurse to White's wife. The wife reported this misdemeanour to the Inspector-General, who dismissed White and allowed the nurse to resign. Kries indeed had the opportunity to assault D'Arcy, as he had keys to all the rooms. The press and subsequent questions in Parliament drew attention to Warden's accusation, claiming that there was a medical coverup. As a result, D'Arcy's body was exhumed for a post-mortem by coroner's order.[23]

Rebuttals by asylum staff of the allegations about the actual cause of D'Arcy's death at the subsequent Coroner's inquest proved counterproductive, as they opened up even more avenues of criticism. Witnesses at the inquest revealed that no post-mortem had taken place until a week after D'Arcy's death and burial. The Government Medical Officers Stratford Sheldon and Henry Palmer, who routinely performed official post-mortems in Sydney at this period, had carried out the autopsy together. They testified that they saw 'no trace' of external injuries.[24] The coroner, John Jamieson, stringently criticised Sinclair's defence of the practice of 'trusted' male patients such as

21 'Alleged Murder of Reception House Patient. Sensational Developments. Conflicting Evidence at Enquiry', *National Advocate* (Bathurst NSW), 10 October 1922, p. 2. Stephen Garton writes that doctors attributed D'Arcy's death to 'acute alcoholic poisoning'. Garton, 'The "Tyranny" of Doctors', p. 351.

22 This patient's name is variously spelled as 'Kries' or 'Kreis' in the newspaper reports.

23 'Reception House. Inmate's Death. Allegations at Inquest', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1922. Garton does not refer to the exhumation.

24 'Martin D'Arcy's Death at Darlinghurst Reception House', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (Maitland NSW), 11 October 1922. According to Trove, the Australian National Library database, Sheldon and Palmer performed numerous autopsies around this period.

Kries being allowed to have keys, including to the female quarters. Kries, who denied any involvement with D'Arcy's death, revealed upon examination that he had been detained at the House for eight years.[25] This practice was at best questionably legal, since the legislated probation period was two weeks. The period could be extended on the written authority of the Visiting Medical Officer (Ross).[26] But the evident use of Kries as de facto attendant for some years flouted the intention of lunacy legislation and the expectations of the public with regard to the ostensible purpose of the Reception House.

2 The Official Response to D'Arcy's Death – Attacks on the Coroner

In November the NSW Chief Secretary, Francis Oakes, responded to public concern by calling for a full report from the Inspector-General, Sinclair.[27] In his subsequent report tabled in Parliament, Sinclair claimed that the evidence against Kries came from a 'tainted source', since Warden disliked Kries and was jealous of his trusted position.[28] He further defended the practice of Kries having keys, asserting that Kries was totally trusted by the superintendent and that he needed keys to effect 'certain repairs'. According to Sinclair, the Coroner's contention that the week's lapse of time between D'Arcy's death and post-mortem may have removed evidence of injury was 'in direct contrast with the medical evidence'.

It would be difficult to overstate the degree of public concern for the fate of mentally ill and incapacitated war veterans, in the aftermath of a war where most families either honoured dead loved ones or cared for damaged, traumatised or disabled men. The Returned Soldiers' Association made frequent representations about veterans' welfare which politicians, many of whom had been servicemen, could not ignore. D'Arcy's case was taken up by Walter Courthope, a barrister and former asylum patient, who had formed an

25 'Martin D'Arcy's Death. At Darlinghurst Reception House', *Maitland Daily Mercury* (Maitland NSW), 14 October 1922.

26 Under paragraph 57 of the 1898 NSW Lunacy Act, no patient could be detained in a reception house beyond 14 days unless the medical officer certified in writing that the patient was not in a fit state to be removed or if the the patient would benefit from longer detention. In effect, the patient could remain until the medical officer said he or she was fit to be removed.

27 'Reception House. Investigation Promised. Coroner Supports "Telegraph" Charges', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 7 November 1922.

28 'The Reception House. Report by Superintendent', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 16 November 1922.

Australia-wide Lunacy Reform League in 1921. He was a frequent speaker at the Association's meetings.[29] Agitation by these bodies were major factors behind the calling of the 1923 NSW Royal Commission into Lunacy Administration.

After his attack on the coroner in his report to Parliament, Sinclair had a further excellent opportunity to revile the hapless coroner, Jamieson, at the Royal Commission. Indeed Jamieson was subject to hostile questioning about the affair by the Commissioners, who overtly supported Sinclair's position. The tenor of the Commissioners' hostile interrogation was that the medically unqualified Jamieson had unjustifiably and irresponsibly reflected on the medical judgements of asylum doctors and the correct processes of the Reception House. They considered that doctors were sufficient judges of the necessity for a post-mortem. The Commissioners insisted that it was impossible that evidence of violence causing death would have disappeared during the week's delay between D'Arcy's death and his death certification, complaining that Jamieson had adversely referred to this delay in reported public statements.

Jamieson denied all these accusations, insisting that he was legally entitled to call for a post-mortem when questionable circumstances were reported. He maintained that the death should have been reported, given the suspicious context, adding that the Chief Secretary, Oakes, had acknowledged the seriousness of the Coroner's remarks.[30] When Sinclair was questioned by a Commissioner about relatives being able to demand inquests into the deaths of patients, as mandated under New Zealand law and in other Australian states, he said that it was 'a shocking thing' that NSW institutions should be looked on with suspicion. It would increase public feeling against asylums.[31]

In the event, the D'Arcy affair reveals that post-mortems were probably the exception rather than the rule AT NSW asylums and the Reception House, at

29 For the political influence of the Returned Soldiers' Association, see for example Kent Fedorowich, 'Ex-Servicemen and the Politics of Soldier Settlement in Canada and Australia, 1915–1925', *War & Society* 20, no. 1 (2002): p. 47–80. For support of Courthope by the Association see W. E. Courthope, letter to the editor 'Treatment of Returned Soldiers', *Age* (Melbourne), 14 February 1921; 'Alleged Cruelty in Asylum. Lunacy Reform Advocated', *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 19 February 1921; 'Returned Soldiers' League. Katanning Sub-Branch', *Southern Districts Advocate* (Katanning, WA), 28 February 1921; 'R. S. and S. I. League', *Northern Star* (Lismore, NSW), 9 March 1921.

30 The Chief Secretary also called for an inquiry into the Reception House. For the Chief Secretary's comments, see for example: 'Inquiry to be Insitituted. Chief Secretary's Comments', *Northern Star* (Lismore, NSW), 7 November 1922.

31 New South Wales Government, *Report of the Royal Commission on Lunacy Law and Administration with Notes of Evidence and Appendices* (Sydney: Alfred Kent, Government Printer, 1923), evidence of Eric Sinclair, Inspector-General, Q45–47.

least before 1923.[32] It appears that the legal position was that deaths were only reported to the Coroner on the initiative of asylum management. An autopsy, if not previously performed at the asylum, would be a precondition of the inquest.[33] Yet suicides, fatal accidents, killings at asylums, or even deaths from natural causes had regularly been the subject of coronial hearings, without any public expression of 'shock' from Sinclair.[34] Clearly at least some of these incidents had arisen from failures of supervision, and were therefore appropriate subjects of public inquiry, as was the death at Gladesville of the patient Dr. Wynnt Martyn in 1920, who by unknown means managed to take a fatal dose of morphine.[35] My examination of the Callan Park case notes suggests that post-mortems were relatively uncommon. When performed, the notes often occupied less than half a page and the findings were typically cryptic or vague. The clear implication in the press reporting was that asylum managers might have been tempted to rush embarrassing cases to the graveyard, as may have happened with D'Arcy.

But the cause of D'Arcy's demise may well be in plain sight. Another anomaly which escaped the Royal Commission's opprobrium was Arthur Price's testimony about the regular practice of attendants issuing potentially harmful medicines in the Reception House without a medical order, as occurred in the D'Arcy case. This unofficial practice was specifically forbidden in the asylum regulations.[36] As with the long stay of Kries and his universal access to cells, the Reception House appeared to have its own rules. Price, the non-medically qualified superintendent of the House, freely admitted giving 'sleeping draughts' containing paraldehyde of 6 to 8 millilitres (1½ to 2 liquid drams) to alcohol patients as a hypnotic.[37] One of the Royal Commissioners (unnamed in its report) did not agree with Price that this dose was not a 'big dose', but such a dosage was recommended as safe in D. Hack Tuke's 1892 authoritat-

32 *Royal Commission 1923*, evidence of Eric Sinclair, Inspector-General, Q45–47.

33 *Royal Commission 1923*, Conclusions, p. xxix.

34 For example, see: 'Suicide in an Asylum', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 15 August 1902; 'Fatal Accident at Callan Park Asylum', *Evening News* (Sydney), 19 January 1904; 'Lunatic's Death. Result of a Blow from a fellow Patient', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 14 February 1905; 'Death at Kenmore', *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* (Goulburn NSW), 4 June 1914 (Cause of death: Bright's Disease).

35 'Morphine Maniac. Death at Gladesville Asylum', *Tweed Daily* (Murwullimbah NSW), 25 May 1920.

36 *Rules for the Attendants, Nurses, Servants and Others*, 'Medicines', p. 8–9.

37 *Royal Commission 1923*, evidence of Arthur Duke Price, Superintendent, Reception House, Q5643–5935. I use pharmaceutical drams, not imperial.

ive *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*.[38] Nevertheless it was nearly the daily maximum dosage used at the period, and Price or his subordinates often gave more than one dose per day.[39] Paraldehyde was used medicinally until the late twentieth century for epilepsy, delirium tremens, and alcohol withdrawal. We know now that paraldehyde may cause death when combined with alcohol, or in cases of liver disease, and that caution should be exercised with heavily intoxicated persons.[40] It is quite possible that the 'sleeping draught' had a fatal interaction with the excess alcohol in D'Arcy's system. What is certain is that D'Arcy's brief life in the NSW mental health system led to the possible uncovering of a 'hidden reality', a 'normality', of embarrassing negligence and incompetence, and playing fast-and-loose with official regulations. It is also a reflection on the incuriosity and partiality of the Royal Commissioners, two of whom were practising physicians, in not pursuing the point further.[41]

3 Henry Swan – 'a Peculiar Case'

Henry Swan's conflicting diagnoses at Callan Park were certainly exceptions suggesting a normality of medical incompetence. Swan, a coach-builder aged 57, fell off a Sydney tram as he was alighting and struck the back on his head in August 1904.[42] According to witnesses at the subsequent coroner's

38 D. Hack Tuke, *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine. Giving the Definition, Etymology and Synonyms of the Terms used in Medical Psychology with the Symptoms, Treatment and Pathology of Insanity and the Law of Lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland.* (Philadelphia, United States: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1892), p. 1134.

39 Francisco López-Muñoz, Ronaldo Ucha-Udabe, and Cecilio Alamo, 'The History of Barbiturates a Century after their Clinical Introduction', *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 1, no. 4 (2005): p. 329–343.

40 Sidney Kaye and Harvey B. Baag, 'Study of Death due to combined Action of Alcohol and Paraldehyde in Man', *Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology* 6, no. 3 (1964): p. 316–320. See also V.J.M. DiMaio and J.C. Garriott, 'A fatal Overdose of Paraldehyde during Treatment of a Case of Delirium Tremens', *Journal of Forensic Science* 19, no. 4 (1974): p. 755–758. For use of chloral hydrate at Callan Park see Roth, 'Chemical Restraint'.

41 These Commissioners were Richard Arthur MLA (Nationalist, 1865–1932) and Robert Stopford MLA (Nationalist, 1862–1926). See *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entries for 'Arthur, Richard' and 'Stopford, Robert'.

42 'Death in Callan Park, Henry Swan's Insanity. Evidence at Inquest. Conflicting Testimony', *Evening News* (Sydney), 15 September 1905. 'Died Callan Park. Some Remarkable Evidence. A Tramcar Incident', *Australian Star* (Sydney), 8 September 1905; 'Death in Callan Park Asylum. Henry Swan's Death. Was it caused by a Tram Accident?', *Evening News* (Sydney), 8 September 1905; 'Inquest. Death at Callan Park. A Peculiar Case', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1905.

inquest, Swan said he was not hurt. But his behaviour worsened at home and he was admitted to Callan Park a week later, suffering from 'acute mania'. Swan died less than a week later; his death was initially attributed to 'exhaustion consequent upon acute mania'. But Gordon Moffat, then acting medical superintendent, told the coroner that he had revised the diagnosis after examining the post-mortem records. Moffat said he had seen the post-mortem investigation performed by Ernest Stacey.

Moffat now concluded that Swan had in fact died due to General Paralysis of the Insane (GPI), a terminal form of late-stage syphilis which affected the brain and nervous system. His symptoms had apparently been exacerbated by locomotor ataxia (another form of neurosyphilis), triggered by the after-effects of his tram mishap. There was no fracture of the skull, but evidence of spinal cord degeneration due to the locomotor ataxia.[43] Moffat considered that the condition of the skull suggested that Swan also had GPI and that the tram accident had precipitated his death. Some corroboration of Moffat's revised opinion came from Swan's wife, who told the coroner that he had been advised by a chemist two years previously that he had locomotor ataxia, but refused to see a doctor.

In his defence of his embarrassing revision, Moffat claimed that he could 'certainly not' have diagnosed the locomotor ataxia before post-mortem, apparently because Henry's reflexes could not be examined due to his condition. Yet signs of neurological damage due to late syphilis could have been readily detectable, such as unequal pupils or their failure to react to light, tremor, or uncertain gait. It appears from Moffat's own observations at the asylum that Swan could not have resisted examination, since he was barely able to walk, a classic symptom of neurosyphilis. The coroner accepted the new diagnosis, but the *Evening News*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Star* drew attention to the conflicting testimony. Their headlines included 'A Peculiar Case', 'Some Remarkable Evidence' and 'Henry Swan's Death. Was it caused by a Tram Accident?'.[44]

It seems clear that the asylum's initial diagnosis of 'exhaustion' was a convenient and time-saving 'catch-all'. The historiography suggests that this classification was a common practice of convenience, a 'normal exception', at this

43 For tabes dorsalis/locomotor ataxia, see Vinay Kumar, Abul Abbas et al., *Robbins and Cotran Pathological Basis of Disease*, (Philadelphia: Saunders Elsevier, 2010), 8th Edition, p. 1301–1302.

44 'Died Callan Park. Some Remarkable Evidence. A Tramcar Incident', *Australian Star* (Sydney), 8 September 1905; 'Death in Callan Park Asylum. Henry Swan's Death. Was it caused by a Tram Accident?, *Evening News* (Sydney), 8 September 1905; 'Inquest. Death at Callan Park. A Peculiar Case', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1905.

period when other causes of death were not immediately apparent. 'Exhaustion' was one of the 'incorrect, loose and coarse terms', used by nineteenth-century doctors according to Rebecca Kippen's account of Australian mortality statistics. Indeed, as Kippen indicates, more plausible and definitive diagnoses were often available in most cases. This criticism is not ahistorical, since physicians made such criticisms at the time.[45] My research into mortality at Callan Park strongly suggests that NSW asylum doctors, including Moffat, were able to assign more and more precise verdicts over the period, but in practice often gave rushed, convenient or speculative diagnoses due to time pressure or lack of care. This was apparently the case for Swan's first diagnosis. In 1900, there were about 200 patients for every doctor.

4 The Force-Feeding of Charles Harper

It is remarkable that the 'normal exception' of the regular (and risky) practice of force-feeding asylum patients who had eating disorders was not a matter of public concern in NSW. My research suggests that about six per cent of all Callan Park patients were fed by 'tube', and that more than a third of these people died. Charles Harper was one of these 'normal exceptions'. Harper, a clerk aged 38, was admitted via the Reception House in June 1903 and was diagnosed with 'mania a potu' (mania due to alcoholism).[46] At the House he had been extremely violent, struggling and shouting, but he showed no sign of such agitation on admission, other than 'a wild look'. A few weeks after admission, Harper became miserable and depressed and began to have eating difficulties. He would only take food with 'much persuasion'. By December he

45 The Tasmanian doctor Edward Hall complained in 1857 of 'very absurd terms' – see Rebecca Kippen, '"Incorrect, loose and coarse terms": Classifying Nineteenth-century English-language Causes of Death for Modern Use. An Example using Tasmanian data', *Journal of Population Research* 28, no. 4 (2011): p. 267–291. See also Phillip Roberts, 'Determining the Meaning behind Historical Disease Terminology through an Examination of Patterns of Terminology Used in the Mortality Statistics of Victoria, 1853–1900', *Health and History* 10, no. 1 (2008): p. 63–87; Phillip M. Roberts, 'Diagnosis as an Artefact: A Case Study to determine the Meaning of "Ague" and "Remittent Fever" in Nineteenth Century Victoria', *Artefact* 37 (2014): p. 3–17; Michael de Looper, 'Death Registration and Mortality Trends in Australia 1856–1906', (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2014)', p. 131, 140, 144, 176; Piers D. Mitchell, 'Retrospective Diagnosis and the Use of historical Texts for investigating Disease in the Past', *International Journal of Paleopathology* 1, no. 2 (2011): p. 81–88.

46 State Archives and Records NSW NRS4994, Item 3/4687, Register no. 6072.

was 'fed forcibly' with the '(feeding) tube'.[47] Although in theory patients were to have their status recorded every month after the initial month of admission, Harper's condition was not written up until May the next year. By that time he was confined to bed and still fed via the 'tube'. By June he was so indifferent to his surroundings that he allowed flies to sit on his face undisturbed, possibly the cause of his eye infection. In fairness, I should add that insect screens were in common use in hospitals at the time, but they could never be 100 per cent effective.[48]

Apparently further use of the 'tube' became either impractical or harmful, since Harper began to be spoon fed. But the attendants said that he would not take food from the spoon unless a 'battery is threatened'. According to his case notes, 'two combs made a good battery' for Harper due to his vision impairment. We know that other patients greatly feared electrical devices, real or imagined, and that they were used as a tool of coercion. I will return to the use of electricity as duress later. By April 1905, Harper was able to stand all day and began to take his food voluntarily, 'putting on flesh'. But his July observation recorded that he continued to be 'very stupid and resistive'. He died in mid-August. According to Harper's death certificate, his cause of death was 'Chronic cerebral disease [duration] 2 years'.[49] There is no evidence of a post-mortem confirming this diagnosis, nor is there any mention of brain disease in the case notes, although some of Harper's recorded symptoms are consistent with neurological pathology.

The case notes for many other patients strongly suggest that force-feeding was a standard practice for patients who would not eat. These hard measures showed the dark side of moral management, the inflexible enforcement of regulation and 'order' with little regard to patient comfort. The pain, risks and stress of force-feeding have been described by a number of scholars.[50] Pneumonia and throat or nose laceration were significant risks. While statistical validity cannot be claimed with regard to these small numbers, three out of twelve of the force-fed persons in my sample of deceased patients at Callan Park died from pneumonia.[51] Admittedly these patients had other comorbidities which could have resulted in terminal pneumonia. Among other

47 For a diagram and description of the force-feeding apparatus, see Elizabeth A. Williams, 'Gags, Funnels and Tubes: Forced Feeding of the Insane and of Suffragettes', *Endeavour* 32, no. 4 (2008): p. 134–140.

48 For example see 'Orange Hospital', *Leader* (Orange, NSW), 6 December 1899.

49 Harper's cause of death courtesy OF NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages.

50 For example see Williams, 'Gags, Funnels and Tubes', p. 136–138.

51 My Callan Park study is based on two samples of the more than 8000 patients admitted between 1877 and 1920; 152 patients who died there and 256 who were discharged.

causes of death for this group were 'exhaustion', 'senile decay', 'melancholia' and 'arteriosclerosis'.

Although Harper's force-feeding took place well before the violent controversy over coercive feeding of English suffragettes from 1909 and the widely reported damage to their health and mental state, the harmfulness of the practice had been raised by medical authorities from the 1850s.[52] Harrington Tuke, a pioneer of moral management, recognised in 1858 that the procedure was cruel, often ineffective and fatal if inexpertly performed.[53] Elizabeth Williams has remarked that nineteenth-century English doctors simply disregarded the distress of patients when force-fed.[54] This nonchalance could not have been the case at Callan Park, since the showing of 'the [feeding] tube' was used quite explicitly as a threat to induce patients to eat. In view of this evidence and the experiences of Tuke and his colleagues, it is not plausible to suggest that patients at my period had perhaps a different *mentalité* with respect to force-feeding, that they were somehow stoic or insensitive to the 'tube'. The unpleasant gagging reflex is a physiological constant. But this was not mindful sadism. Callan Park doctors evidently believed that force-feeding, or the threat of it, was the only way to rescue patients wasting away on 'hunger strike'.

5 'Elizabeth', 'Martina' and 'Mary' – Coercion by Electricity

Another 'normal exception' at Callan Park was the use of electric medical devices, ostensibly as a means of coercion. As noted, Harper was deceived and coerced into eating by the use of mock apparatus. Electricity in some form had been used to treat various complaints since antiquity.[55] Galvanic (direct current) and faradic (alternating current) electrical treatments, not to be confused with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), were in widespread use in asylums, hospitals and in private practice in the nineteenth century and later. They were used to treat neurological conditions, heartburn (cardialgia), epi-

52 Williams, p. 137.

53 Harrington Tuke, 'On Forced Alimentation', *Asylum Journal of Mental Science* 4, no. 24 (1858): p. 204–222. See also Ron van Deth and Walter Vandereycken, 'Food Refusal and Insanity: Sitophobia and Anorexia Nervosa in Victorian Asylums', *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 27, no. 4 (2000): p. 390–404 and Williams, 'Gags, Funnels and Tubes'.

54 Williams, p. 137.

55 M. R. Mourino, "From Thales to Lauterbur, or from the Lodestone to MR Imaging: Magnetism and Medicine", *Radiology* 180, no. 3 (1991): p. 593–612.

lepsy and paralysis.[56] I should stress that ECT was not used medically until the 1930s.[57]

'Elizabeth', a 25 year old 'excited and violent' former housemaid was admitted in 1887, diagnosed with 'mania acute'.[58] In the first week of her stay, she too had to be force-fed, but began to eat after two applications of the 'tube'. For a short time, the threat of force-feeding was sufficient to induce her to eat, but a week later she was force-fed daily. She became 'very noisy and troublesome' but was induced to eat and become quieter after 'repeated applications of a galvanic battery'. After successive relapses and food refusals, Elizabeth was tried with courses of morphine, hyoscyamine, warm baths and then digitalis.[59] She showed considerable improvement after the water treatment. Apparently electrical 'therapy' was considered to be no longer effective. She gradually became 'well conducted' and was discharged after twenty months at Callan Park.

'Martina', a housewife aged 32, was admitted in 1887 and diagnosed with 'melancholia del[usional]'.[60] The 'supposed cause' of her illness was 'child bearing' – four of her six children had died. 'Martina' would not speak but understood what was said to her. When a faradic current was applied to her she 'spoke freely', saying that 'the Tierneys' (presumably her perceived enemies) sent electricity through her, making her do what they wanted. They told her to get drunk and break pictures of the Queen. 'The Tierneys' had allegedly done this for two years. Martina soon recovered mentally and physically and was discharged two months after admission.

'Mary', a former hotel keeper, was also subject to electrical coercion, in order to get her out of bed after recovering from an ankle injury.[61] She had been a patient at Callan Park from 1904 to 1906, but was re-admitted later in 1906, aged 62, suffering from 'melancholia recurrent'. Mary had a history of alcoholism. After a few months, she became 'quiet and well behaved', working in

56 Edward Stainbrook, 'The Use of Electricity in Psychiatric Treatment during the Nineteenth Century', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 22 (1948): p. 156–177.

57 Jonathan Sadowsky, *Electroconvulsive Therapy in America: The Anatomy of a Medical Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 41.

58 Under the terms of my access to Callan Park records, I must use pseudonyms for patients where it is not certain that they died more than 110 years from the current date. For 'Elizabeth's case notes, see State Archives and Records NSW, NRS4994, 3/4661, Register no. 1307. 'By tube' meant use of a gastric tube and funnel for force feeding.

59 Apart from its use for heart complaints, digitalis was widely used as a sedative in asylums in the nineteenth century. See C.L. Robertson, 'Remarks on the Use of Digitalis in the Treatment of Insanity', *British Medical Journal*, 2, no. 144 (3 October, 1863): p. 364–367.

60 State Archives and Records NSW, NRS4994, Item 3/4661, Register no. 1270, Folio 80.

61 State Archives and Records NSW NRS4994, Item 3/4692, Register no. 7316.

the sewing room. But her health and mental state seemed to change when she sprained her ankle in late 1906 and had to spend some time in bed. After three weeks 'Mary' could not be induced to get out of bed and use the injured ankle until 'a battery was at last applied'. There were only one or two observations recorded per year between 1906 and her death 1918, but it seems that her health gradually declined and she became demented and unable to work by 1914. Her causes of death were 'Chronic brain disease, senility, cardiac failure no duration'.[62]

From these three cases and the deception of William Harper, it is evident that patients feared electrical apparatus. It seems that it was a regular practice for staff to take advantage of this fear to coerce patients and make them tractable. At the same time, it should be recognised that electrical therapy had legitimate applications. At the 1923 Royal Commission, Clifford Henry, a doctor at the Rydalmere asylum in western Sydney, testified that the galvanic battery was a standard treatment for paralytic cases.[63] It had never been applied to the head and was not painful to the patient. He strongly disputed hearsay evidence by ex-patients that one patient had 'screamed' during the treatment. There is no other evidence which suggests that Henry had used his apparatus unprofessionally. The Commission members had tested his equipment on themselves and found no painful effects.

6 Conclusion

Some of these stories have been not been revealed or only partially exposed until now, and then only 'through a glass, darkly', as at the 1923 Royal Commission. The 'exceptions' discussed here were 'normal'. Even though D'Arcy's death was not a routine event, it exposed the clear risks of the unqualified medical treatment of a vulnerable alcoholic. The coroner plainly thought that he may have been rushed to the grave without proper examination. With respect to force-feeding of patients or coercing them by its threat, or the threat of electrical devices, this was an age before doctors required informed consent. We

62 Courtesy of NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages.

63 *Royal Commission 1923*, evidence of Clifford Henry, senior resident medical officer, Rydalmere Mental Hospital, Q3815–3850. Electrical treatments had been widely used for a range of illnesses, including mental illness, since at least the 1890s. See Josef Zervas, *A Manual for the Treatment of Diseases by Electricity employing the Faradic Current* (Jersey City, New Jersey: F. G. Otto & Sons, 1888). Unlike Henry, Zervas advised application to the head for some conditions.

might now, ahistorically, regard such practices as sadistic torture, disrespecting the mental and physical integrity of the patients, and their human rights. But the force-feeding of British suffragettes in prison from 1909 to 1914 was denounced at the time as 'degrading' and medically unethical.[64] It seems that asylum doctors at the period believed that survival, however achieved, was in the patient's best interest. At times doctors could rush to judgement, as in the case of the multiple diagnoses of Henry Swan. In contrast to the heated controversies concerning suffragettes, which were widely reported in Australia, the regular, 'normal', practice of force-feeding of patients never came into the public gaze.[65] Reducing the scale to the individual patient has brought into sharp focus the hidden dark side of the putatively benevolent policy of moral management as practised at Callan Park.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship. I am grateful to Frank Bongiorno AM, Professor of History at the Australian National University, and to my friends in the National Centre of Biography, for their advice and comments.

64 Ian Miller, *A History of Force Feeding: Hunger Strikes, Prisons and Medical Ethics, 1909–1974* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

65 For example, see: 'What English Suffragettes object to in Gaol. The "Torture" of the Tube. What it is really like to have Food forcibly Administered by the Feeding Tube', *Sun* (Sydney), 13 February 1910; 'Forcible Feeding. 'A complete Failure'', *Sun* (Sydney), 27 July 1912; 'Forcible Feeding Deplored. Bishop condemns Practice', *Herald* (Melbourne), 6 July 1914.

‘Une génération spontanée’: Kandinsky Seen through the Eyes of Felix de Boeck (1898–1995)

David Veltman

There are almost as many different sorts of biography, as there are biographies. Each has its own conception, its own style and its own wording. A theoretical framework is seldom mentioned explicitly in a biography, but the critical reader will be interested in the choices that a biographer made to tackle his subject, the way he treated his sources or how his work differs from that of others. In recent theoretical literature on biography, a division is made between high and low biography. In *high biography*, the author engages critically with his sources, whereas in *low biography*, he just reproduces the story that someone has made up during his life.[1] Furthermore, in low biography, the research starts with the presumption that the person under scrutiny made a set of unique choices, which made him famous, important or exciting. The question why his life is worth a biography is not addressed. In high biography, then, the unicity of a life is related to its representativity: how much can we say about the time or group in which someone lived, by describing the individual choices someone made during his life?[2]

Questions regarding the representativity of a single life are also addressed in microhistory. In this methodology, observations on a small scale are made in order to comment upon larger developments. The participant’s perspective is central in this approach: how do individual choices or interpretations correspond with or deviate from a normative group?[3] Whereas the socio-economic historian is often focused on developing concepts that he wants to apply to historiography from the top down, the microhistorian is mainly concerned with the process of conceptualizing itself. Microhistory is therefore not about research on tiny objects. By reducing the scale of the observation, the microhistorian can say something about bigger developments. The research into the

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

2 Hans Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie. Over biografen, historici en journalisten* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), p. 46.

3 Giovanni Levi, ‘On Microhistory’, in: Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives in Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 99.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_012

individual life can offer a *corrective* to a well-established view we have of history.[4] It all depends on the narrative or style of the biographer: is he able to connect the individual life to large scale developments in a convincing way?

Microhistorians prefer to use new sources in their description of cultural history. In his seminal study *The Interpretation of Cultures*, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz introduced the concept of *thick description* to show that an existing interpretation of a cultural practice should be tested by theories from different scientific disciplines. The result of this analysis would be a 'historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life'.[5] The symbolic embodiment of meanings is important here. Geertz invented the so-called 'drama analogy' to describe the meaning of various symbols and rituals in the Balinese tradition of the cock fight. In his view, this ritual could be compared with a role playing game: when different roles are carried out, people search for resemblances between their practices. This convergence leads to the formulation of new rules or protocols that can govern the social setting in which the individual is playing his role.[6] It is up to the biographer to untangle the convergence of different roles: why does someone act like a father figure, for example, or as a prodigy? The biographical subject tries to give a coherent image of himself, but the biographer is capable to view this image from different angles, in order to show internal discrepancies in his self-representation.

The drama analogy also points to another aspect of microhistory: the biographer's commitment to the participant's perspective requires special attention to the 'stage' on which the action takes place. Microhistory shows in which environment the behavior and choices of the individual are fully accepted, no matter how much these deviate from our usual perception of history. In microhistory this principle is referred to as the 'normal exception'.[7] In different

4 Simone Lässig, 'Introduction', in: Volker Berghahn and Simone Lässig (eds.), *Biography between Structure and Agency. Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 7. See also: Nigel Hamilton, 'Biography as Corrective', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan, and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 15–30.

5 Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description. Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 3–30.

6 Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description. Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', p. 25.

7 Hans Renders, 'The Limits of Representativeness. Biography, Life Writing, and Microhistory', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 132.

domains (such as the family, or politics) people may have related differently to the existing norms in society. The biographer is able to show how different domains pertain to each other in the life of the individual. This way, individual choices can increase our understanding of the various domains in which the individual was active.

In what follows, the principle of 'normal exception' will be applied to the Belgian 'constructivist' avant-garde of the 1920s. I will argue that this avant-garde group can be seen as a normative group, which influenced the mentality of its members in a profound way. To narrow my subject, I will look at the way the theoretical treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, published by Wassily Kandinsky in 1912 was interpreted by one Belgian artist, Felix de Boeck (1898–1995). Artists belonging to what we now call the avant-garde of the 1920s almost never described themselves as 'avant-garde' – they preferred to use terms such as 'pure', 'communal' or 'constructivist' artists, although they all gave a slightly different meaning to these terms. But one can say that they were all profoundly influenced by Kandinsky's art theory. For example, artists and writers like Jozef Peeters, Jos Leonard and Paul van Ostaijen were under his spell for a period of time.[8] This influence can only be recognized fully once you have made yourself familiar to Kandinsky's theoretical writings. The same is true for biographies of these artists: the life of many artists that belonged to the avant-garde of the 1920s, was modelled after Kandinsky's theoretical viewpoints. Not only the artists themselves were responsible for this modelling, but also their biographers: for a long time, they took the narrative for granted that an avant-garde artist should live like a visionary hermit, as someone who is ahead of his time and his people. According to this narrative, members of the avant-garde were not influenced by others, nor did they make artistic work to make a living out of it. Although the avant-garde of the 1920s is now part of 'high' culture, the biographies that are written about the individual artists that belonged to this group, can often be considered 'low' in the sense that they do not question their self-representation.

Felix de Boeck argued that the reason Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was so widely approved of by those of his generation, was because it was seen as a justification of the earlier cubist, fauvist, and futurist develop-

8 Johan de Smet, 'Voorbij de mimesis: wegen naar een autonome kunst in Belgie (1917–1930)', in: De Smet (ed.), *Modernisme. Belgische abstracte kunst en Europa*, (Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 2013), p. 64. Melders states that Jozef Peeters' copy of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was heavily annotated by the artist. Robert Melders, *Jozef Peeters (1895–1960)* (Antwerp and Amsterdam: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1978), p. 20.

ments in their work. For that reason he claimed that his first abstract work, which he created in 1919, was an 'oeuvre créatice d'une génération spontanée': something that had spontaneously developed in his artistic evolution.[9] The new approaches to art, as practiced by various members of the avant-garde, invoked various practices in De Boeck's own life, as well in his art. Especially after four of his five children died at a young age, De Boeck wanted to provide a spiritual value to his paintings. By comparing his artistic practice with a form of prayer – he could only work on his paintings on Sundays – he was able to cope with his grief over this loss. This conviction lead him to believe that the spirit of his dead children was present in his paintings: he could not sell them, but preferred to give them away.

De Boeck had not read Kandinsky himself, but *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was widely discussed at the meetings held every Saturday at his family farm in Drogenbos, just outside of Brussels.[10] The artist was able to keep a degree of *naïveté* with regard to the formal and substantial problems of the art of his time, because he was an autodidact.[11] There was no possibility for him to follow lessons in art schools, since these were closed during the Great War and because his father needed him to work on the farm. But in his spare time, he did read a lot of avant-garde treatises, such as Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) and Theo van Doesburg's *De nieuwe beweging in de schilderkunst* (1917). There is no oral or written account of what De Boeck actually thought about these art theories. In what follows, a microhistorical method is used to show that the choices and interpretations he made during his life, cannot be understood without taking Kandinsky's avant-garde model into account.

1 Kandinsky's Model

In the avant-garde of the 1920s, a 'German model' can be designated, in which artists from various European countries simultaneously focused on constructivism as promoted by Kandinsky. The *Bauhaus* in Weimar was one of the

9 Lutgart Dusar, *Doorheen het leven van Felix de Boeck: zijn vormingsjaren en deelname aan de modernistische kunststrekkingen van de twintiger jaren, geplaatst in het kader van de Europese en Belgische kunstevolutie*, unpublished thesis (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1973), p. 128.

10 Bart Cassiman, *Felix de Boeck of de weg van de plastique pure sentimentale naar het vergeestelijkt realisme*, unpublished thesis (Ghent: Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1984), p. 168.

11 Sergio Servellón, with Anne Adriaens-Pannier, *The oeuvre of Felix de Boeck in drawings* (Wijnegem: Pandora Publishers etc., 2012), p. 12.

first institutions to give substance that model. In the Bauhaus, art and life came together in a new way: artists from various disciplines lived in small communities, in which they collaborated in an organized way on a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The projects that the Bauhaus embarked on in the first years, from 1919 to 1922, had a utopian, quasi-religious character in particular.[12]

By the time the German avant-garde model was introduced in Belgium in 1919, Kandinsky had already left his position as a champion of innovation in art. During a trip to his Russian motherland in 1919, he had experienced the introduction of the Soviet program. That had made him lose all hope with regard to the spiritual values in art: artists were only allowed to make art that was in service of the worker. For that reason, during his lessons at the Bauhaus, which he started in 1922, he would teach his own art theory in a cut-down form. The fact that *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was nevertheless so influential in Western Europe suggests that at least contradictions can be identified in its reception by various members of the avant-garde.[13]

In his art theory, Kandinsky searched for an underlying structure, which he called the 'internal necessity' of a work of art, that allowed it to move beyond time and space, beyond the personal and the national.[14] In order to meet this principle of 'internal necessity' artists had to search for a striking style, which he described as one of 'clashing dissonants'.[15] He called on artists to combine seemingly incompatible qualities in their work, such as strong color contrasts and spatial disorder, that could provoke feelings of chaos in the art viewer. This way, artists could detach themselves from academic prescriptions to base their work on a narrative or anecdote, or from conventional notions of beauty and harmony. Kandinsky believed that modern music in particular best expressed the anarchist principle of clashing dissonants. It was explicitly made to shock the public.[16]

After reading Kandinsky, members of the 'constructivist' avant-garde of the 1920s chose to base their paintings no longer on perception. Instead they ascribed a spiritual quality to their work which served to give them autonomy from reality. The choice of the avant-garde for autonomous art and a non-Catholic spirituality stood in stark contrast to the artistic practices prescribed

12 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les avant-gardes artistiques 1918–1945. Une histoire transnationale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), p. 197.

13 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les avant-gardes artistiques 1918–1945*, p. 202.

14 Wassily Kandinsky, 'On the Spiritual in Art', in: Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Virgo (eds.), *Kandinsky. Complete Writings on Art* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 155.

15 Wassily Kandinsky, 'On the Spiritual in Art', p. 179.

16 Wassily Kandinsky, 'On the Spiritual in Art', p. 206.

by the Catholic Church.[17] Among themselves too artists had different views about how their abstract paintings should relate to the real world. Though this work is often labeled as 'constructivist', in fact a spectrum of artistic views hide behind this label, more or less recognizing the possibility of religious inspiration.

De Boeck borrowed from *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* a 'constructivist' art practice. This practice deviated to a certain extent from the way in which his contemporaries gave substance to constructivism. In the historiography of the avant-garde of the 1920s, there is a tendency to reduce constructivist art to its formal qualities.[18] There is little to no mention of the various spiritual orientations that these artists derived from Kandinsky. This one-sided interpretation could be due to a radical form of Marxist cultural criticism, which gained popularity in Western Europe in the 1950s.

One of these Marxist critics was Peter Bürger, a philosopher who saw the avant-garde as a movement attacking the institution of art itself. In his book *Theory of Avant-Garde* he contended the division between art history and the history of philosophical reflections on art. The aesthetician should be aware of the bourgeois circumstances in which the avant-garde developed, paving the way for new categories to judge art.[19] Bürger saw the avant-garde as a historical phenomenon, independent from other movements, such as modernism. He ascribed a form of institutional self-criticism to the way the avant-garde discussed the autonomy of the arts: the artistic practice of the avant-garde could not simply be integrated in other practices of daily life. What we are used to see as the 'autonomy of the arts', is in fact an ideological category of bourgeois society. On the one hand, the avant-garde showed that a certain artistic detachment was possible from other human activities, but on the other, the art historian cannot deny the fact that this detachment is the result of a sociohistoric process. In bourgeois society, we learned to judge avant-garde art as an independent category. According to Bürger, the goals, production and recep-

17 Theo Salemink, "Huiver voor ontaarding.' Katholieken en avant-garde', in: Frank Bosman en Theo Salemink (eds.), *Avant-garde en religie. Over het spirituele in de moderne kunst 1905–1955*, (Utrecht: Van Gruting, 2009), p. 289.

18 For example Michel Huysseune, 'Le constructivisme', in: Jean Weisgerber (ed.), *Les avant-gardes littéraires*, (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1991), p. 331–336; Anne Adriaens-Pannier and Frederik Leen (eds.), *Avant-Garde in België 1917–1929* (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet, 1992) and Johan de Smet (ed.), *Belgische abstracte kunst en Europa* (Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten 2013).

19 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 22–23.

tion of the modernist artwork could be completely different compared to, for example, a religious artwork.[20]

The life of De Boeck shows that an autonomist view of the artist in fact could be combined with other practices. De Boeck said he gained 'spiritual freedom' by working on his art solely on Sundays. He lived autonomously as a farmer in Drogenbos, and never took the initiative to organize exhibitions or to sell his paintings in galleries. He saw himself as an outsider, whose avant-garde perspective on modernist art was not influenced by others. Nonetheless his farm attracted people from around Belgium to discuss his art with him. Thus, he indeed attacked the very institution of art, since his income was enough to be independent of the museum or gallery world. Although he saw a kind of self-criticism in his involvement in the avant-garde, this was mostly influenced by his religious upbringing. He wanted to show that his abstract art could be combined with Roman-Catholic motives, such as the crucifix and the holy cross. In his constructivist art practice, De Boeck did not merely show an idealistic longing for redemption from the influence of social structures. He also embodied a cultural critique in a way that combined a certain optimism with an ascetic life style. In a letter to his friend, the artist Prosper de Troyer, he wrote that: 'A worker is such a peculiar person, elevated above the masses [...] It is perhaps more correct to state that we are not superior, but happier people.'[21] In De Boeck's view, the worker is elevated above the common people because according to him society should not be arranged according to a capitalist order, but to the degree in which people are happy. This non-capitalist interpretation of his artistic practice can be regarded as a clue to the divergent mentality of the rural avant-garde artist.

2 Avant-Garde and Kitsch

The radical aesthetic innovation that was proposed by the avant-garde of the 1920s, can be discerned in a distinct way from the broader field of modernism. Whereas modernism engaged with the approval or declination of modernity, avant-garde was as a more fundamental counterpart to conventional art or kitsch, made for the masses. This dichotomy formed the starting point of the American critic Clement Greenberg in his influential essay 'Avant-Garde and

20 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 48.

21 Letter by Felix de Boeck to Prosper de Troyer, 'April 1920', photocopy in private archive Felix de Boeck, Drogenbos, own translation.

Kitsch', published in *The Partisan Review* in 1939.[22] According to Greenberg, the avant-garde could be seen as an artistic elite, which had its roots in nineteenth century bohemia: art should not be meddled by politics. The avant-garde was to be seen as an independent category in society, searching for 'pure', 'abstract', 'non-objective' or 'non-representational' art in order to free culture from ideological dispute. Since the introduction of the avant-garde, art had become its own object, whereas the social-realism as dictated by the Soviet states had only served the mediocre taste of the masses.

Although Greenberg wanted to believe otherwise, the avant-garde of the 1920s did meddle with politics. The self-referentiality that he saw as a distinct feature of the avant-garde art, was in fact for many artists a way to express an utopian ideal: they wanted to show an esoteric connection between art and life.[23] Following Kandinsky's theory, artists like Theo van Doesburg or Jozef Peeters wanted to start an international artist's league, representing the concerns of the artist in other realms of society. Each in their own way, they propagated a non-political art that was neither serving the masses, nor could it be called 'bourgeois'. Their art was able to show the way to a new society, as long as it was not subjected to party politics, nationalism or religious dogma. The avant-garde of the 1920s was not so much concerned with the formal qualities of art itself, as Greenberg's autonomist perspective suggested. These formal qualities could better be described as the expression of a universal 'spirit' that the artist wanted to express, in order to invoke a mystic union between art and society.[24]

Apart from a few exceptions, such as Sixten Ringbom's study: *The sounding cosmos. A study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (1970), from the 1950s onward it was considered not done to interpret abstract art based on allusions to esoteric modes of thinking. Such interpretations were seen as a defense of the 'occult' Nazi Germany, even though the Nazis themselves dismissed constructivism as 'degenerate art.'[25] This one-sided interpretation can cause the modern day cultural historian to lose sight

22 Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in John O'Brien (ed.), *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume I Perceptions and Judgments* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 5–22.

23 Hubert van den Berg, 'Avant-garde art as art at the service of the revolution. On pure art and *Tendenzkunst* as two answers to the question: "Should the new art serve the masses?"', in: Kari J. Brandtzaeg (ed.), *The shadow of war. Political art in Norway 1914–2014/ Krigens skygge. Politisk kunst in Norge 1914–2014* (Oslo: Teknisk Industri, 2015), p. 55.

24 Hubert van den Berg, 'Avant-garde art as art at the service of the revolution', p. 59.

25 Rose-Carol Washton Long, 'Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction. Kandinsky's Art of the Future', in: *Art Journal* 46, no. 2 (1987), p. 39.

of the artist's individual agency. Indeed, De Boeck derived his agency from the occult concepts in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* in a way that differs from that of his contemporaries. For members of this avant-garde, a self-representation as an autonomous artist was very important. The true artist was expected to be in the vanguard, to come up with new ideas on his own and in doing so, to not be influenced by predecessors.[26] This view of the avant-garde required a great deal of dedication to the arts, which could not be combined with other activities. In addition to this ascetic desire for purity or control, the avant-garde also promised freedom. It presented itself as if it were able to open its eyes to a new society that could arise if all artificial structures in 'old' society were removed. This urge to get rid of artificial structures was often formulated using the discourse of a *rupture intégrante*: by using older traditions, such as Catholicism or mysticism, the new art was made comprehendible.[27] The Belgian avant-gardists searched for a spirituality that was behind the visible reality. The way they thus distanced themselves from society, can be described in spatial terms: they needed a physical seclusion in order to get a higher state of mind. Their representation of the artist's workshop can be compared to a convent, which could only be visited after undertaking a pilgrimage. Avant-gardists wanted their art to belong to a 'community', in which an exchange could take place of the 'codes' needed to get a deeper understanding of the structures that held society in captivity.[28]

3 Center and Periphery

The Belgian constructivist avant-garde often portrayed itself as if the big city was its 'natural' habitat. It was in the cultural centers of Antwerp or Brussels where innovation in the arts happened, because this is where artists came into contact with one another, exchanged ideas, and presented their work. The avant-garde derived its identity from this urban orientation: the city offered opportunities to develop an ascetic way of life, which was utterly

26 Sandra Kisters, *The Lure of the Biographical. On the (self-)representation of modern artists* (Amsterdam: Valiz 2017), p. 105.

27 Durand argues that, in order to convince people of its radical urge for renewal in the arts, the avant-garde made use of a 'banal reduction' [*une banalisation réductive*] of existing practices or 'codes'. Pascal Durand, 'D'une rupture intégrante. Avant-garde et transactions symboliques', in: *Pratiques* 50 (1986), p. 41.

28 Rajesh Heynickx, 'Space and mystic comtemplation. On the Self-Fashioning of Converted Avant-Gardists', in: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 88, no. 4 (2010), p. 1282.

not hampered by the need to earn a living. This representational space also implied a new relationship between the artist and the people, who, with the help of 'functional' architecture and constructivist paintings, could be made aware of the purity of the spiritual world beyond observable reality.[29]

Due to a historiography of the avant-garde dominated by American critics such as Greenberg or Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, the avant-garde was very much associated with internationalism. This made later art historians turn a blind eye on nationalisms in the avant-garde.[30] The so-called Flemish activism is a specific case in point. This nationalist movement was harshly repressed after the First World War by the Belgian government, since it brought about a transformation by the Dutch speaking younger generation, who joined forces against the French speaking ruling classes. The activists made use of a pacifist, communist or internationalist discourse. Radical members of the avant-garde wanted to connect with the most progressive wing of the Flemish Movement. They questioned the continued existence of the Belgian nation, mostly out of spiritual motives, such as their belief in universal peace.[31] This opened their minds to international developments in the arts, like fauvism, futurism or constructivism – but most of the time they gave a national orientation to it: to show that Flemish culture could exist in its own right.

This nationalism was not unique to Belgium: different avant-garde centers in Europe (Paris, Berlin, Weimar) were in fact competing with each other.[32] It is often argued that within the European avant-garde network, a non-hierarchical structure could be identified, of which artists could become a member, regardless the language they were speaking.[33] But in Belgium, with its continuous struggle for emancipation of Dutch speaking culture against a francophone elite, the situation was different. In Belgium, a binary model

29 Evert Peeters, Leen van Molle and Kaat Wils, 'Introduction: Modern Asceticism: A Historical Exploration' in ed. Peeters, van Molle and Wils, *Beyond Pleasure. Cultures of Modern Asceticism* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2011), p. 9.

30 Hubert F. van den Berg, 'Expressionism, constructivism and the transnationality of the historical avant-garde', in: *Transnationality, Internationalism, and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Hubert F. van den Berg and Lidia Głuchowska (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 26.

31 Michel Huysseune, 'Le constructivisme', in: *Les avant-gardes littéraires*, p. 314.

32 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Provincializing Paris. The Center-Periphery Narrative of Modern Art in Light of Qualitative and Transnational Approaches', in: *Artl@s Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (2019), p. 40–64.

33 Michał Wenderski, *Cultural Mobility in the Interwar Avant-Garde Art Network. Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), p. 7.

between the center (Brussels or Antwerp) and the surrounding periphery was adopted. Many Flemish constructivists, like Jozef Peeters, questioned the status of Paris as a cultural center, whereas their francophone contemporaries were much more oriented towards this city.[34]

As a result of his bilingualism, De Boeck functioned as a gatekeeper between the two language communities in Belgium. It appeared that the division between center and periphery was not very clear: in fact, his farm was mostly visited by both Dutch- and French speaking inhabitants of Brussels, who liked to take a walk from the Brussels-South railway station to the countryside. De Boeck's life was seen by his Dutch speaking friends as a symbol of old Flemish values, connected to the soil he was toiling, the family life and Christian faith. By his francophone friends, the fact was promoted that he spoke French fluently, had exhibited in Paris and came into contact with members of the international avant-garde there, like Piet Mondrian and Michel Seuphor. But this did not hamper this self-representation as an authentic Flemish farmer. De Boeck preferred to stay in Drogenbos, and let the people come to his place. Thus, he was active in different networks: some transnational, some not.

4 Conclusion

De Boeck had not read Kandinsky, but art historian Bart Cassiman makes a plausible case that a 'diluted form' of Kandinsky's conception of art was definitely known to him.[35] Cassiman points to the importance De Boeck attached to an 'inner necessity' for example in the fact he only worked on his paintings on Sundays. The artist was to surrender himself completely to his artistic craft, but in doing so also had to be able to make himself 'spiritually free', meaning: his mind should be free of the occupations of daily life.

De Boeck was convinced that with his abstract paintings he could bring about a special kind of communication with the art viewer. In this way he also explained his urge to work in a serial manner. Every time he painted an abstract painting, he contributed to the formation of a new thought within

34 Paenhuysen argues that one can find a defense of regionalism within the Flemish avant-garde next to the usual cosmopolitanism. An Paenhuysen, *De Nieuwe Wereld. Wonderjaren van de Belgische avant-garde (1918–1939)* (Amsterdam and Antwerp: Meulenhoff and Manteau, 2010), p. 11–24.

35 Bart Cassiman, *Felix de Boeck of de weg van de plastique pure sentimentale naar het vergeestelijkt realisme*, p. 168.

the art viewer, because it was made in a new state of mind. De Boeck may have derived this desire to come into contact with the spirit of his audience indirectly from Kandinsky: in conversations with his comrades, he must have been convinced of Kandinsky's view of the artist's spiritual abilities. In *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, the art theorist presented himself as a Messiah, whose purpose was the spiritual awakening of humanity.

Kandinsky's universalism, which aimed to show within the painting an expression of the 'pure and eternally artistic', had with De Boeck made way for a Catholic perspective, to find the hand of God in each work. His self-representation had the characteristics of a calling: he wanted to sublimate his religious feelings in his abstract paintings, which would reveal themselves to the art viewer in a mystical way. His portraits too were provided with this aura: he often made a series of portraits of the same person in different color compositions, in which each portrait expressed different states of mind. De Boeck combined his Catholicism with a constructivist perspective on art. With Kandinsky, he saw the materialism of modern society as the reason why people were turned against each other, and why there was no longer a shared awareness of the humanitarian community.

In their descriptions of the Belgian constructivist avant-garde, art historians were often simply reproducing the contingencies of De Boeck's life. The way he represents himself as belonging to the 'periphery' of the art scene is taken for granted. In fact, there was a continuous interface between Brussels and its periphery. The dominant status of Brussels in Belgium did not remain unquestioned in other centers, such as Antwerp or Paris, or even in rural artist's communities as Sint-Martens-Latem. Artists who were not working in Brussels, were not automatically reduced to the dominated periphery. In their self-representation, avant-garde artists were all too convinced of their views upon the dichotomy between 'center' and 'periphery', or between 'art' and 'community'. Their biography can show that they were in fact full of doubts about these divisions: they could easily jump from one view to the other. This oscillation was characteristic for the avant-garde of the 1920s, but also for later generations. In this research, Greenberg's division between avant-garde and kitsch, based upon the self-referentiality of art, appeared not adequate to describe the 'spiritual modernism' of De Boeck. He was more concerned with how art could contribute to a new world. Whether this ideal was reached with help of 'pure' art or with help of political or religious ideas, was seen by him as two sides of the same coin.

Although he wanted his biographers to believe otherwise, De Boeck's position as an artist was not as isolated from the rest of the constructivist group. Instead, it is better described as the result of a continuous exchange between

the group mentality of the avant-garde and the artist's own normative values. In this article, the way De Boeck's individual life deviates from or concords with these mentalities and values was problematized. Depending on his self-education, Catholic faith and income from non-artistic work, De Boeck was able to describe his agency as 'autonomous' to a certain degree.

The motivations the Belgian constructivist avant-garde had for the spiritual interpretations of their art showed something of their mentality. In the biographies of these artists, attention should be paid to their combinatorial abilities to bring together different views on art. I was able to show that the origin of many of these views could be found in Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. The big city seemed to be environment in which the 'different' behavior and choices of the avant-garde artist were fully accepted. The constructivist mentality, with its unusual combination of freedom and control, of anarchy and mysticism, was more prevalent in the city than in the countryside. Still, the example of De Boeck showed that in the countryside too, in spite of the dominant Catholicism, there was a certain freedom to give his own substance to the spiritual value of abstract art.

Template for a Biography: What's the Sense of Theory

Hans Renders

Certainly when many studies have been published of a certain person, it is important that a biography is based on a solid basis, on a theoretical plan. What accents does the future biographer stress and according to which method an individual, so often described, can be clearly emphasized. And above all, it is important to state in a theoretical plan why a theoretical embedding will be a useful addition to the existing historiography. Below an attempt is made to provide a template for a biography. It is not even necessary to know the person with a biography. This is about the framework. I try to illustrate this with a biography by Theo van Doesburg that is yet to be written.

Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931), founder of the periodical *De Stijl*, theoretician, artist, architect, poet, novelist, interior designer, typographer, photographer and above all, propagandist for abstract art, had an influence on the international avant-garde which cannot be overstated.[1] Between 1910 and 1920, he built up a large international network that he put to work in his effort to make *De Stijl* a revolutionary, innovative periodical about the practice of modern art in Europe. The ambitious style with which he manifested himself in the international art world made him a leader. At the end of his life, however, he found himself being abandoned by his original companions in the De Stijl movement. An early adept like the architect Cornelis van Eesteren failed him in 1926, when he pledged his participation to the international periodical *i10*, a project of Arthur Müller-Lehning, J.J.P. Oud and others, which took over the role of *De Stijl*: 'I've agreed to work on Oud's magazine [...] When you judge the magazine, you shouldn't forget that the 'Stijl' has become entirely the personal expression of van Doesburg, with all of the consequences that that entails. The 'Stijl' has become a kind of private correspondence between you and the read-

1 Hannah L. Hedrick, *Theo van Doesburg. Propagandist and practitioner of the avant-garde, 1909–1923* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); Marguerite Tuijn, *Mon cher ami... Lieber Does... Theo van Doesburg en de praktijk van de internationale avant-garde*, unpublished thesis (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University, 2003); Gladys Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (eds.), *Van Doesburg & the international avant-garde. Constructing a new world* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_013

ers. In that role, it is important; it has, however, simultaneously ceased to be the organ of the so called Stijl group.'[2]

Concerning Van Doesburg and the diverse aspects of his work, a large quantity of secondary literature has been published. His visual and literary work has been collected in Els Hoek (ed.), *Theo van Doesburg. Oeuvrecatalogus* (2000), which contains an extensive bibliography of publications devoted to him.

In exhibitions around the world, attention is frequently devoted to Van Doesburg's art. Recent examples are *De Stijl 1917–1931* (Centre Pompidou, Paris 2010–2011), *1917* (Centre Pompidou-Metz 2012), *Inventing abstraction 1910–1925. How a radical idea changed modern art* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York 2012–2013), *Modernisme 1912–1930. Belgische abstracte kunst en Europa* (Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent 2013) and *Utopia 1900–1940. Visies op een nieuwe wereld* (Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden 2013–2014).

A comprehensive study of Van Doesburg does not exist. In 1983, Evert van Straaten carried out pioneering work with *Theo van Doesburg 1883–1931. Een documentaire op basis van materiaal uit de Schenking van Moorsel*. Building on the foundation Van Straaten established, studies addressing Van Doesburg's various roles, as theoretician of architecture, poet, periodical editor or painter, have appeared, but a publication in which all of his activities and their interconnections are brought together does not exist. Little is known about the sources of his inspiration, his background and his experiences. Van Doesburg was a theoretically orientated artist who took an interest in politics, religion, philosophy and sociology. He was a member of a political party, toyed, in the years preceding the First World War, with pacifism, maintained an association with the Bond van Revolutionair Socialistische Intellectueelen [Union of Revolutionary Socialist Intellectuals], was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, and Van Doesburg converted to Catholicism shortly before he died. The letter of condolence written to Nelly van Doesburg by Antony Kok, with whom Van Doesburg became friends during the First World War, is full of religious symbolism and contains an explicit indication of his conversion: 'How glorious his soul must now feel, being close to God, in a wonderful light, with infinite possibilities of development surrounding him.'[3] These developments

2 Letter Cornelis van Eesteren to Theo van Doesburg, 26 December 1926 (The Hague, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie [Netherlands Institute for Art History], Van Doesburg-archive, no. 60).

3 Letter Antony Kok to Nelly van Doesburg, 12 March 1931. (Cited in: Alied Ottevanger (ed.), *'De Stijl overal absolute leiding' De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Doesburg en Antony Kok* (Bussum: Thoth, 2008), p. 561–562.

in his thought will be understood in the context of the role which Van Doesburg played in various networks in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Eastern Europe, Italy, Switzerland and France.

Van Doesburg's work has for the most part been effectively surveyed in the published catalogue devoted to his oeuvre, but about his personal life we know very little. A modest amount of research has been done on his life with his first wife, Agnita Feis, but about his life with his second wife, Lena Milius, we know little; about his third wife, Nelly van Moorsel, a biography has been published.[4] Biographical information can also be gained from his published correspondence with Antony Kok, Alexander Archipenko, Tristan Tzara, Hans Richter and Enrico Prampolini.[5] A scattering of correspondence with Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky and Giorgio De Chirico and other Italian futurists has also been published.[6] Systematic research into his correspondence has, however, never taken place.

Van Doesburg's family history is still terra incognita; we know practically nothing about his biological father, except that he was a photographer who left his family when Theo was one year old and went to Germany. Van Doesburg's period of military service in Alphen, near Tilburg, has only been investigated in relationship to his contact with Antony Kok, the railway man from Tilburg.[7] The development of his literary ideas and their relation to his visual art has never been addressed. The manner in which he negotiated societies like De Anderen, Konstruktivistische Internationale, Abstraction-Création – to name just three of many – has never been described in detail. There are many such areas of interest which have hardly been investigated. Van Doesburg published – in some cases, under a pseudonym – literary work, wrote pamphlets and manifestos, established groups of artists, maintained a huge

4 W. de Graaf, 'Over A.H. Feis. Een poging tot portret', in: A.H. Feis, *Oorlog. Verzen in staccato* (Woubrugge: Avalon Pers, 1981), p. 33–47; W. de Graaf, *Liefdevol bijsturen. Theo van Doesburg tussen huwelijk en verhouding* (Zoeterwoude: De Uitvreter, 1996); Wies van Moorsel, *Nelly van Doesburg 1899–1975* (Nijmegen: SUN, 2000).

5 Ottevanger, *De Stijl overal absolute leiding*; Tuijn, *Mon cher ami… Lieber Does… Theo van Doesburg en de praktijk van de internationale avant-garde*.

6 Kurt Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt. Briefe aus fünf Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nüdel (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1974); El Lissitzky, *Proun und Wolkenbügel. Schriften, Briefe, Dokumente*, eds. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers & Jen Lissitzky (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1977) and Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers (ed.), *El Lissitzky. Maler, Architekt, Typograf, Fotograf. Erinnerungen, Briefe, Schriften* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1992); Giovanni Lista, *De Chirico et l'avant-garde*. (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1983).

7 Will Tromp and J.A. Dautzenberg, *Kok van De Stijl. Spoorwegbeambte te Tilburg* (Oosterbeek: Bosbespers, 1989); Alied Ottevanger, *De Stijl in Tilburg. Over de vriendschap tussen Theo van Doesburg en Antony Kok* (Amsterdam: Stokerkade, 2007).

network of consonant personalities abroad and moved alternately in the Netherlands, Germany and France among his artist-brothers.

Many of the artists with whom Van Doesburg associated became world-famous, people like Wassily Kandinsky, Walter Gropius, Piet Mondrian and El Lissitzky. In Belgium, France, Germany and Eastern Europe, Van Doesburg played an important role. In the projected biography, we will attempt to reconstruct his network with precision in order to be able to understand better the life and work of Van Doesburg and to place them better in their national and international context. In that effort, we will not limit ourselves to artist colleagues, but will also concern ourselves in our research with art dealers, periodical editorial boards and the like. An important research question will be: if and if so to what extent, Van Doesburg influenced the leaders of expressionism, cubism, Dadaism, constructivism, surrealism and Neue Sachlichkeit [New Objectivity] with his ideas. Van Doesburg's reputation, the dispersal of his work and the reactions it provoked represent sufficient justification for writing his biography, which will be a contribution to our existing knowledge of all the domains where Van Doesburg was active.

1 Methodology

Research into Van Doesburg's life is of importance for various areas of research in general history, art history, literary history, European history, the history of the Netherlands and of the First World War, artistic movements, like constructivism and Dadaism, architectural history and art theory. Biography, as a form of *microhistory*, would seem to be an ideal method for undertaking this research. *Microhistory* is not to be considered as research into something 'small', but rather a way of addressing the large story surrounding one participant (Theo van Doesburg).[8] This manner of investigation can provide answers to questions about the representativeness or uniqueness of Van Doesburg. To what extent was he an innovative theoretician? What did he know about art in 1914? Did political developments like the First World War and the Russian Revolution play a role in his thought about changes in the visual arts, as he describes them in many essays in *De Stijl*? How did he conceptualise war and politics and in what ways was that different from the accepted ideas in the artistic world?

8 Hans Renders, 'The limits of representativeness. Biography, life writing and microhistory', in: Hans Renders & Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical discussion of biography. Approaches from history, microhistory, and life writing* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 129–138.

One important focus of attention is of course Van Doesburg's relation with Piet Mondrian. How did these two artists influence one another? And was their estrangement really only caused by their attitude toward the straight line? Van Doesburg's relation with the architect J.J.P. Oud also deserves attention, because by analysing their divergent convictions about architecture and the use of colour, Van Doesburg's can be defined with greater clarity.

By comparing experiences in his private life and its turning points with those in his public life, the interaction of private and public can be investigated, and we can answer questions about the influence Van Doesburg's wives had on his work.[9] A chapter will be devoted to the significance of art for social debates and how those debates reverberated in Van Doesburg's *Nachleben*.[10]

In this intended biography, much attention will be given to the international transmission of ideas, literature and art. To that end, Van Doesburg's exchange of letters with artist colleagues domestically and internationally will be investigated; a comparison will be made, for example, between *De Stijl* and other avant-garde periodicals between 1916 and 1930, but attention will also be given to the role of art dealers and other mediators like Léonce Rosenberg, H.P. Bremmer or Jane Heap.[11]

Although in the biography much attention will be devoted to Van Doesburg's rich world of ideas, an express effort will be made to write a biography which is also accessible to a wide reading audience. We are aware of a number of biographies which define a type which we intend to match. Lucy Hughes-Hallett succeeded in writing a splendid biography of the comparably multidimensional Gabriele d'Annunzio, poet, novelist, fashion-guru and nationalist

9 Sjoerd van Faassen and August Hans den Boef, "Ik moet zingen, altijd maar weer zingen van U'. Liefdesgedichten van Theo van Doesburg voor Lena Milius', in: *Jaarboek Letterkundig Museum* 8 (1999), p. 59–99.

10 Cf. e.g. Nancy J. Troy, *The afterlife of Piet Mondrian*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013.

11 Ian Hamilton, *The little magazines. A study of six editors*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London 1976. Suzanne W. Churchill, *The little magazine* Others *and the renovation of modern American poetry*. Ashgate, Hampshire 2006; Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible (eds.), *Little magazines & modernism. New approaches*. Ashgate, Hampshire 2007; Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of modernism. Literary elites and public culture*. Yale University Press, New Haven 1998. Mark S. Morrison, *The public face of modernism. Little magazines, audiences, and reception, 1905–1920*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2001; See for example Malcolm Gee, *Dealers, critics, and collectors of modern painting. Aspects of the Parisian art market between 1910 and 1930*. Garland, New York-London 1981; Hildelies Balk, *De kunstpaus. H.P. Bremmer 1871–1956*. Thoth, Bussum 2006; Chistian Derouet (ed.), *Correspondance Fernand Léger-Léonce Rosenberg 1917–1937*. Musées National d'Art Moderne, Paris 1996 and similar publications of the correspondence between Rosenberg and Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

politician, and likewise Jeffrey Meyers, with his biography of the British writer, painter and magazine publisher Percey Wyndham Lewis.[12]

The relevance of this research: The transition from figurative art to abstract art is, in existing literature, largely associated with Piet Mondrian. The research on Van Doesburg will broaden this perspective, not only because Van Doesburg, more than Mondrian, placed the development of his art in the context of art theory, but especially because this revolutionary turn in the visual arts can be interpreted by means of the social convictions of Van Doesburg against the background of other types of modernising, in particular with respect to the reputation of art in public life, the status of the artist and the increasing role of public opinion.[13] Of great value in reconstructing public opinion and Van Doesburg's reactions to it are the many publications and letters to the editor in small newspapers and weeklies, such as *Eenheid, De Avondpost*, *Het Volksdagblad* and *De Controleur*.

Since Van Doesburg was both a practicing artist and a theoretician in many fields, this research is exceptionally well placed to compare and discuss the diverse styles of social criticism (for example, his series of articles in *Eenheid* about militarism and European warfare). A wide variety of contacts profoundly influenced Van Doesburg both philosophically and artistically. This research will investigate in which phases of Van Doesburg's life he was receptive to, for example, the ideas of foreign artists like Guillaume Apollinaire, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters and others, or those of the religious-socialist Bart de Ligt, the Limburgian philosopher Mathieu Schoenmaekers, the artist Janus de Winter and the anarchist visionary Erich Wichman. The influence of these artists and thinkers will be measured in relation with Van Doesburg's positions on faith and politics. On the basis of his first publications in left-orientated newspapers like *Het Volksdagblad* and *De Controleur* and his involvement with revolutionary-socialist brochures, we will consider the extent to which his political convictions played a role in his promotion of new art forms.

The typographer Van Doesburg, the photographer, the man of letters, the collage-maker, the designer, the architect with an interest in using new materials and technical applications, and the interior designer expressed, in many

12 Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Gabriele d'Annunzio. Poet, seducer, and preacher of war*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2013 resp. Jeffrey Meyers, *The enemy. A biography of Wyndham Lewis*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1980.

13 See among others Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the culture of celebrity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2005; Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism is the literature of modernity*. University of Texas Press, Austin 2011.

publication, his perspectives about new possibilities which were appearing in the arts and about how to incorporate those in his own art. Van Doesburg has been considered an important and innovative architect right up to the present day. His collaboration with J.J.P. Oud and Cornelis van Eesteren has been the subject of a number of studies, as has his (realised) design for a house for artists in Meudon (near Paris) and his collaboration with Hans and Sophie Arp in the redecorating of the cinema-dance hall Aubette in Strasbourg, in which his ideas seem to converge. What is the relation between his architectural ideas and modernism in literature and painting?

In a number of cases, Van Doesburg employed an alias, especially for his literary work. In that way, he tried to give shape and foundation to a diversity of parallel identities. This diversity of self-representation has never been the subject of research. In this biography, this practice will be associated with Van Doesburg's personal life on the basis of archival research but also scholarship on representation, network analysis and 'masked' appearances in public spaces.[14]

It is our intention to place this research in the context of the political instability in Europe in the period leading to the First World War; the First World War itself and the reactions to it in the arts; the international tensions associated with the Russian Revolution, fascism and the tensions in Germany; the economic crisis; and Berlin and Paris as foci of renovation.[15]

As a turning point, Kandinsky's lecture *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1912) demands notice, as does his introduction into the Netherlands in 1913 with a sensational exhibition in Rotterdam. But is that actually a turning point? In the first place, there is reason for doubt because Van Doesburg himself gave it that label. He had read Kandinsky's autobiography *Rückblicke* (1913); and says that he was impressed by the theoretical support for Kandinsky's decision to produce abstract work from that time on. It was particularly Kandinsky's advocacy of the 'spiritualisation' of painting that had made a powerful impact on Van Doesburg. He discovered, in his own words, what the consequences would be of striving for 'higher things' in art and of presenting himself as a

14 Gerhart Söhn, *Literaten hinter Masken. Eine Betrachtung über das Pseudonym in der Literatur*. Haude & Spener, Berlin 1974; Robert J. Griffin (ed.), *The faces of anonymity. Anonymous and pseudonymous publications from the sixteenth tot the twentieth century*. McMillan, New York 2003; Max Saunders, *Self impression. Life-writing, autobiographiction, and the forms of modern literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.

15 Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe 1900–1914*, Basic, New York 2008; Sacha Bru, *Democracy, Law and the Modernist Avant-Gardes. Writing in the State of Exception*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2009.

champion of modern painting during the period of his military mobilisation.[16] Van Doesburg and his new friends from Tilburg even read Kandinsky's two publications aloud to each other.[17]

In retrospect, it is almost too beautiful to be true: Kandinsky who wrote about the 'Geistige' and the abstract in the arts, and Van Doesburg who not long thereafter founded *De Stijl*, with which he sought and achieved great international attention for his geometrical perspectives. With these doubts in mind, we turned to Van Doesburg's private life. We found material there that accounted far more persuasively for turning points than Kandinsky's publications.[18]

On 1 August 1914, the First World War broke out. Van Doesburg was mobilised and stationed near the border with Belgium, quartered in the house of the Milius family in Tilburg.[19] There he became acquainted with Lena Milius. He was thirty-one; Lena was almost six years younger. In Tilburg, too, Van Doesburg became friends with the railway employee and poet Antony Kok and a fellow-conscript, the Frisian shoemaker and sculptor Evert Rinsema. Kok and Van Doesburg organised soirées, during which Van Doesburg read 'modern verses' aloud. Kok became Van Doesburg's confidant in poetic matters, partly because Van Doesburg admired him and his poetry. When Van Doesburg met Lena for the first time, he was still married to Agnita Feis. Just like Van Doesburg, Agnita, two and a half years his elder, also had literary ambitions. Late in 1915, she self-published a collection entitled *Oorlog. Verzen in staccato*. Agnita had debuted on 29 March 1913 in *Eenheid* with aphoristic texts, but Albert Verwey, a figure important for the post-symbolist movement, also accepted her poems for his periodical *De Beweging*. Van Doesburg's literary work did not succeed in getting past Verwey's critical filter, but in 1916 Verwey did accept Van Doesburg's essay 'De nieuwe beweging in de schilderkunst' [The new movement in painting] for *De Beweging*. This essay marks the transition from expressionism to neo-plasticism in Van Doesburg's thought. Van Doesburg himself worked for the fluid *Eenheid*, a weekly 'for social and spiritual

16 Letter Theo van Doesburg to F.C. Waller, 28 February 1915. (Amsterdam, Special Collections, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Waller Collection.)

17 Letter Theo van Doesburg to Antony Kok, 31 May 1915. (Ottevanger, *De Stijl overal absolute leiding*, p. 78.)

18 See for this remark and other passages Hans Renders and Sjoerd van Faassen, 'Biographies as multipliers: The First World War as turning point in the lives of modern artists', in: *The Biographical Turn. Lives in history* (Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma ed.), Routledge, Oxon-New York, 2017, p. 91–103.

19 A.M.P. Kleijngeld, *Gemobiliseerde militairen in Tilburg tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*. Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact, Tilburg 1983.

movements', at first with reviews, moralistic essays about the abominations of war and, from 1913, also with narrative prose, drama and a few poems.

After Van Doesburg was demobilised in February 1916, he moved to Haarlem. A year later he married Lena and moved to Leiden. The poems which he wrote for her during the war represent a transitional phase in Van Doesburg's verse, from a traditional idiom to the experimental poems which he published under the alias I.K. Bonset in *De Stijl*, after a period of comparative silence as a writer.

Despite his passionate love poems, Van Doesburg's relationship with Lena did not last either. In early October 1920, he met the pianist Petronella (Nelly) van Moorsel, seventeen years his junior, with whom he would share the rest of his life.

Unlike Van Doesburg's first and third wives, Lena did not publish. Agnita published a collection of poems and wrote articles. Nelly van Doesburg travelled with her husband throughout Europe; she became one of the artists with whom Van Doesburg collaborated – Tristan Tzara called her 'the indispensable Dadaistic musical instrument of Europe' – and she devoted the forty years of her life after the death of Theo entirely to his legacy. Nevertheless, there is every reason to assume that the turning point of Van Doesburg's life was the moment when he met Lena Milius, the bookkeeper in the city where Van Doesburg was quartered as a conscript and about whom we know, as we have said, so very little. So far. The encounter with the railway employee Antony Kok and the shoemaker Evert Rinsma also appear to be more important than Kandinsky's lecture *Rückblicke* or *Über dat Geistige*.

Why? First, his manuscripts reveal that he developed from a traditional to an experimental poet. We then see that around 1915, he does not depend on Kandinsky, Janus de Winter or Piet Mondrian, as he had previously done, but that he is interested in exerting his own influence, for example on Antony Kok and Evert Rinsema, while the inspiration which was generated from these friendships also had a considerable influence on his own development as an artist. A fruitful cross-fertilisation, then. And the period when he made the acquaintance of Lena acted as the incubation time for the ideas that would lead to the establishment of *De Stijl* two years hence.

In the company of Lena, the brothers Rinsema and Kok and freed from the creative competition with Feis, which he described in autobiographical prose, Van Doesburg was able to take up the role of visionary, and begin to practice for the later role which he played with so much verve: theoretician of art and propagandist.

We consider the acquaintance with Lena Milius, Kok and Rimsema as *the* turning point in Van Doesburg's life. What should the biographer do with such

an insight? Interpret everything in its direction? No, not in the least. Turning points are also useful for giving structure to a biography, even if the turning points prove subsequently to be less than world-shaking. By selecting a certain structure, it is possible to be less preoccupied with constructing an inventory and more with argumentation. And that is an advantage. Turning points are important for interpreting someone's life, but they are equally important for the narrative of the biography. The most useful of these insights, however, is that the biographer allows himself to be a microhistorian, not so that he can seek out each and every detail; but rather, to be able, by means of a small story, to place a larger, pre-existing story in a more nuanced perspective – not simply to confirm that larger story. So microhistory is a method!

In 1913, art was moving everywhere in the direction of abstraction. Kandinsky in Munich, Robert Delaunay and František Kupka in Paris, Kazimir Malevitsj in Russia and Piet Mondrian in the Netherlands increasingly tried, each in his own way, to free their work of every reference to reality.[20]

At the time, Van Doesburg still painted in a traditional style, but his letters and other writings from the period make clear that he was preoccupied with the formulation of his new perspectives about art. He just had to share it with a few people who were willing to listen.

In an epilogue to this biography, a justification will be provided for the working method. A justification of the genre biography in relation to Van Doesburg is desirable precisely because so much has been published about him. The relation between biography and other kinds of literature will also be made clear. This biography will not be a re-interpretation of Van Doesburg in terms of art history, but rather an historicising narrative in which both Van Doesburg's uniqueness and representativeness will be implicitly discussed. Not all of Van Doesburg's work will be discussed. In that sense, there is a clear distinction between the research carried out for the biography and the form the biography takes. We research and analyse Van Doesburg as broadly as possible, but in the final biography, the results will act as illustrations for the story of the authors. That is to say that Van Doesburg's network, his methodology, the influences from his private life and his ambitions will be described on the basis of a synthesis of the genres in which Van Doesburg worked. We will do this to

20 See for example Jan de Vries (ed.), *Nederland 1913. Een reconstructie van het culturele leven*. Meulenhoff/Landshoff, Amsterdam 1988; Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1913. The cradle of modernism*. Blackwell, Oxford 2007; Florian Illies, *1913: het laatste gouden jaar van de twintigste eeuw*. (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2013), p. 51. Also in Hans Renders and Sjoerd van Faassen, 'Biographies as multipliers: The First World War as turning point in the lives of modern artists'.

avoid producing a biography which is a catalogue of works with commentary, and to create for ourselves as microhistorians the possibility of detecting the turning points in the life of Van Doesburg. We will investigate the contacts and insights which influenced Van Doesburg to develop from a post-symbolist to a politically engaged champion of architecture and applied art; and how his personality, described by some as dogmatic, affected his network, for example the estrangement from J.J.P. Oud in *De Stijl*, his relation with the Flemish constructivist periodical *Het Overzicht*, his conflict with Bauhaus, his relationship with the Konstruktivistische Internationale, his exclusion of competing poets like Til Brugman, H. Marsman, Paul van Ostaijen and Hendrik Werkman and his *The Next Call*. The relation between anarchism and Van Doesburg's Dadaism also provides the possibility of placing personality, poetics and political consciousness in a historical context.[21]

A biography is not a rolled out wikipedia page, but rather a booklength piece of work that can be discussed. A theoretically justified plan can mobilize its own criticism with which a biographer can benefit. Theory, and this does not mean 'instruction' of 'how to do', raises the awareness of a biographer. The biography will benefit from this. That is also the sense of theory.

21 Cf. e.g. Patricia Leighten, *The liberation of painting. Modernism and anarchism in avant-guerre Paris*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013.

Building a Better Biography

Carl Rollyson

William Faulkner (1897–1962), winner of the 1949 Nobel Prize for literature, has not lacked for biographers, beginning with Joseph Blotner's two-volume, two-thousand page monument in 1974, followed by comprehensive lives in 1979, 1980, 1984 (Blotner's one-volume revision), 1987, 1989, 1993, 2004, 2009, 2017, as well as compact biographies in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2016, 2018, and biographical chapters in literary studies.[1] In spite of all this work, I felt compelled to write yet another two-volume biography, which, by my standards, is the first to come to terms with all the significant aspects of Faulkner's life and work. A concise account of the full-length biographies that preceded mine will highlight my own biographical method and practice.

Blotner's work is the bedrock of Faulkner biography. A professor at the University of Virginia during Faulkner's residence there (1957–1962), Blotner became a kind of Boswell but also the authorized biographer with exclusive access to Faulkner's wife Estelle and other family members and friends.

1 Joseph Blotner: *Faulkner: A Biography* (Random House, New York 1974); *Faulkner: A Biography* (Random House, New York 1984); Judith Wittenberg, *Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1979: David Minter, *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1980); Stephen B. Oates, *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist* (HarperCollins, New York 1987); Frederick Karl: *William Faulkner: American Writer: A Biography* (Grove Press, New York 1989); Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993); Jay Parini, *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner* (Harper, New York 2004); Philip Weinstein, *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009); André Bleikasten, *William Faulkner: A Life Through the Novels* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2017). M. Thomas Inge, *William Faulkner* (Overlook Illustrated Series, Duckworth 2006); Carolyn Porter, *William Faulkner: Lives and Legacies* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007); David Rampton, *William Faulkner: A Literary Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2008); Robert W. Hamblin, *Myself and the World: A Biography of William Faulkner* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2016); Kirk Curnutt, *William Faulkner* (Reaktion Books, London 2018). For biographical chapters, see Michael Grimwood, *Heart in Conflict: Faulkner's Struggles With Vocation* (The University of Georgia Press, Athens 1987); Joseph Urgo, *Faulkner's Apocrypha* (The University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 1989); Doreen Fowler, *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville 1997); Kevin Railey, *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner* (The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa 1999). These are by no means the only biographical chapters but simply those that came to my attention and that seemed especially relevant to this essay.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_014

Blotner provided a thorough accounting of the origins and development of Faulkner's writings and collected documents and other data that scholars are still digesting. Except for recounting his own friendship with Faulkner, Blotner adopted an objective voice, withholding comment on vital scenes in his subject's life. For example, he recounted Estelle Oldham's apparent suicide attempt during her honeymoon with Faulkner without noting its impact on her husband or reporting her own comment on this episode. It is not clear from his papers or from his subsequent articles about his biography that Blotner even asked her about several important aspects of her marriage. While reviewers were grateful for Blotner's massive treasure of biographical data, several deplored his apparent unwillingness to shape all this material into a coherent interpretation. His one-volume revision provided a more focused narrative, but the lack of candor and even curiosity about certain aspects of Faulkner's life remained a problem.

As if supplying an antidote to Blotner's agnostic account, Judith Wittenberg delivered a highly speculative psychological biography, making much of Faulkner unconscious attitudes that influenced his creation of characters and his way of presenting his own biography. Whatever one makes of her interpretations, she opened up Faulkner biography to the kind of searching analysis Blotner eschewed. But she also disarmed herself as a writer of biographical narrative by allowing her critical judgments of Faulkner's work to prevail over a full understanding of his whole life. She repeated an opinion, already well established by certain critics of Faulkner's work, that his greatest period as a writer ranged from 1929 to 1942. That left twenty years of a downward trajectory that are a dismaying prospect to behold in her book. In short, she let her training as a literary critic block her from an immersion in what those twenty years meant to Faulkner and how he lived them.

David Minter, next up, avoided psychobiography, preferring to focus on the culture in which Faulkner fashioned a sense of himself as an artist. An insightful literary critic, Minter, like Wittenberg, did not do much original biographical research, relying instead on the Blotner bedrock – as did historian Stephen Oates, who saw an opening for a 'pure biography', using 'novelistic techniques'.[2] Oates is a throwback to 19th-century romantic biography: 'As the train roared through the Mississippi countryside, the boy and his two brothers sat transfixed at the open window of the passenger coach, watching the shadowy forests, the hazy fields of corn and cotton, the occasional farm houses and

2 Oates, *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist*, p. 13–14.

barns, all slide backward toward Holly Springs. It was an arduous trip for their mother, a small prim woman with auburn hair and stern eyes. The coach was oppressively hot, and cinder flakes from the locomotive swirled through the open window, sullying the boys' faces and clothes. But Billy, the oldest, had seldom been so excited. Already he had a love for the steam locomotive that rivaled his father's. The sharp burst of its whistle, the hum of its wheels, the throb of the exhaust exploding from its stacks – all thrilled the boy to incandescence.'[3]

Biographers usually write this way for children.

After Oates, an astringent needed to be applied, which is what Frederick Karl supplied in a thousand-plus-page biography portraying the man, the myth, his family history, his work and sense of his own life, as demonstrated in this wonderful concatenating first paragraph: 'When Faulkner (Family name, Falkner) was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897, there was still a mythical America; and it was still possible for an individual to wrap himself in that myth. Part of the myth had attached itself to the Falkner family well before the writer was born – its violence, its frontier qualities, its efforts to relocate itself as part of the Southern planter aristocracy – but Faulkner also created his own. Those famous silences which characterized his public pose were an essential part of the mythmaking; they seemed to locate him on some mystical or magical ground where no one else could tread. Faulkner desperately wanted to be a great writer, but he wanted just as desperately to be an epic hero. But nature and nurture reinforces that willed sense of self.'[4]

Then historian Joel Williamson provided an in depth exploration of Faulkner's Southern heritage, including a fresh and revealing investigation of the Faulkner family history. Richard Gray rectified Williamson's failure to deal adequately with Faulkner's fiction by showing how a sense of history suffused Faulkner's work. What could Jay Parini add at this point? A dutiful biographer, he acknowledged the most recent trends in Faulkner criticism, mentioning, for example, that 'feminist and poststructuralist critics have tended to look at the story ['The Fire and the Hearth'] as a 'subtle defense of the southern status quo in which African-American challenges to oppression either are defused through humor or are displaced to the margins of the text (and thereby trivialized)."[5] Such awkward asides may win elections, but they doom biography.

3 Oates, *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist*, p. 3.

4 Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer: A Biography*, p. 3.

5 Parini, *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner*, p. 257–258.

The 'one matchless time' referred to in Parini's title is the period between 1929 and 1942, when Faulkner 'found not simply his own voice but a teeming chorus of voices, each of them distinct, whole, and authentic'. So we return to Wittenberg and the supposition that after 1942 we are left with the indistinct, fragmentary, and inauthentic. The same bias prevails in André Bleikasten's biography (first published in French in 2009), which seems like another work up of Blotner. Estelle Faulkner appears in Bleikasten as a lamentable marriage partner, fey and on the periphery of what matters to the critic eager to get on with explications of texts. That Estelle Faulkner wrote fiction, that Faulkner even submitted fiction under both their names and rewrote at least one of her stories, does not interest Bleikasten, even though such facts suggest why at certain times Faulkner found Estelle to be an indispensable partner, no matter how much he complained about her as a burden and an irrelevance. Biography is not supposed to take subjects at their word – at least not without the scrutiny that Faulkner's own characters aim at one another – but that is essentially what Bleikasten does.

Perhaps believing that yet another chronological biography of Faulkner would not yield significantly new results, Philip Weinstein decided on a more radical approach, dividing Faulkner by topics and shifts back and forth in time. While Weinstein makes astute comments on his subject's life and work, he also fragments and dislodges Faulkner from his time and place. Only a chronological, historically based, narrative of Faulkner's evolving and contradictory statements and treatments of race, for example, can hope to align the man and his art.

Nagging at my own need to write a Faulkner biography was the work of Carvel Collins, whose immense collection at the University of Texas, is a treasure of primary sources, including interviews with many people who had passed away by the time Blotner began his work. Judging by the notes in previous biographies, I am the first biographer to look at every one of the 105 boxes in the Collins collection. Several Collins interviews also corroborate Blotner and add a good deal of texture to my biography. Collins was unusual in many respects. Unlike most academic biographers of his era, which began in the late 1940s, he collected everything, not just what pertained to the writer's work. By the summer of 1967, he had made more than thirty visits (over a twenty year period) to Oxford, Mississippi, and he would continue to work on his biography until his death in 1990, never even beginning to write a narrative, so far as I have been able to ascertain. He spoke with the notable figures in Faulkner's life, including Faulkner himself, but also with with anyone who had contact with his subject. In that respect, Collins is superior to Blotner, especially for a biographer who values the minute particulars that help to reveal the man as well as the writer.

Nearly as important was Judith Sensibar's biographical study of the women in Faulkner's life.[6] She finally restored Estelle Faulkner to an important place in Faulkner biography, showing the impact of Estelle's fiction on her husband, although still not placing Estelle firmly and chronologically in the frame of Faulkner's life. Sensibar dealt with Faulkner's mother and his African American caretaker, Caroline Barr, but the biographer did not go beyond those relationships to explore the importance of other women in Faulkner's life, especially Meta Carpenter, Joan Williams, Else Jonsson, and Jean Stein, who become central characters in my biography.

Faulkner spoke parsimoniously about his private life and disparaged his screenwork, some of which he took home from Hollywood. His fiction and film, together with the women he loved, including the wife he could not live without – had not been integrated into a unified narrative of an intertextual biography – a back and forth between different kinds of writings and lives in Oxford, Mississippi, in Hollywood, in New York City, and in various locations abroad. Overlooked also was the testimony of his wife's and stepson's letters, and other records of what family and home life meant to him. And there were people still alive who had observed him as a father and neighbor, and these people had never been interviewed until I arrived on the scene.

A recent biographer has termed Faulkner's work in Hollywood 'lackadaisical', even though as early as the 1970s, Bruce Kawin began comparing Faulkner's fiction and screenwork, and Kawin's scholarship has been carried on by Robert Hamblin, Peter Lurie, Ben Robbins, Sarah Gleeson-White, Stefan Solomon, and others.[7] But no biographer had taken up Robbins's insight: 'Faulkner both reshaped and was shaped by the alien territories of commercial film.'[8] No biographer had taken seriously Meta Carpenter's memory of Faulkner's enthusiastic work on scripts about World War II, or seemed to know that Faulkner and director Howard Hawks at one time considered forming a production company.[9] No biographer saw how Faulkner's work on *Drums*

6 Judith L. Sensibar, *Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped His Art: A Biography* (Yale University Press, New Haven 2010).

7 Curnutt, Chapter 5, Kindle edition; Bruce Kawin, *Faulkner and Film* (Ungar, New York 1977); *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays* (University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville 1982); The work of Hamblin, Lurie, and Solomon is represented in Peter Lurie and Ann J. Abadie (eds.), *Faulkner and Film* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2014); see also Sarah Gleeson-White (ed.), *William Faulkner at Twentieth Century-Fox: The Annotated Screenplays* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017); Ben Robbins, 'The Pragmatic Modernist: William Faulkner's Craft and Hollywood's Networks of Production', in: *Journal of Screenwriting* 5(2014)2, p. 239–257.

8 Robbins, 'The Pragmatic Modernist', p. 241.

9 Meta Carpenter Wilde and Orin Borsten, 'Hollywood 1943', in: *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection Volume IV: Battle Cry, A Screenplay by William Faulkner*

Along the Mohawk (1939) had seeped into the writing of *The Wild Palms* (1939), or that one of his last screenplays, *The Left Hand of God* (1955), spoke directly to his own plight as a Nobel Laureate in an atomic postwar, Cold War, world.

It is difficult to wrench from my two-volume life an extended example of how I have tried to overturn the typical narrative of Faulkner biography because each moment in my book calls on the whole of Faulkner's experience that went into the creation of, for example, his screenplays. Perhaps the closest I can come to a demonstration of my method is an account of his screen adaptation of *The Left Hand of God*. Meta Carpenter said Faulkner did not think much of the novel as the basis of a film.[10] But he voiced his skepticism before he wrote the screenplay, and the results show that he changed his mind.

A Howard Hawks biographer boils down the director's pitch: A picture based on William E. Barrett's 'timely and inspirational novel, *The Left Hand of God*, about an American flier trying to escape the embattled China of 1947 disguised as a priest. The trappings of the story – the resourceful pilot hero, a gorgeous young nurse, the endangered outpost of humanity [a Catholic mission] trying to stave off violent and unpredictable forces – had obvious appeal to Hawks, who certainly would have played up the adventure and romance angles.'[11] But what was the appeal to Faulkner? The money was good: $2000 a week and a bonus if Faulkner finished the work in a month. But did he need the money after the $30,000 Nobel award? In fact, he did, because he had set up a $25,000 trust fund. Much of the Nobel wealth would go to doing good works so that Faulkner would become the benefactor of his community, just like the hero he would fashion for *The Left Hand of God*.

But would money alone be enough to entice a Nobel Prize winner's return to the site of the Hollywood horror show and memories of the Ward, where he bent over his typewriter turning out products for the two-headed Warner Brothers monster he had drawn in a cartoon for his daughter Jill? In a handwritten discarded draft of the Nobel speech, he had recorded his humiliation and outrage: 'A few years ago I was taken on as a script writer at a Hollywood studio. At once I began to hear the man in charge talking of 'angles', story

(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), p. ix–xi; Carl Rollyson, *The Life of William Faulkner, Volume 2: This Alarming Paradox, 1935–1962* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), p. 239.

10 Meta Carpenter Wilde and Orin Borsten, *A Loving Gentleman: The Love Story of William Faulkner and Meta Carptenter* (Simon and Schuster, New York 1976), p. 320.

11 Todd McCarthy, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood* (Grove Press, New York 2000), p. 485.

'angles', and then I realized that they were not even interested in truth, the old universal truths of the human heart without which any story is ephemeral – the universal truths of love and honor and pride and pity and compassion and sacrifice.'[12] Why collaborate with the enemy? What could Hawks have said that would have moved Faulkner to return? Well, it was Howard Hawks, and Faulkner believed he owed a man whose work Faulkner respected and perhaps even learned from. How could he deny Hawks, who had been responsible for Faulkner's most important screenwriting credits: *To Have and Have Not* and *The Big Sleep*?

And what if *The Left Hand of God* abetted Faulkner's own work? What if Faulkner's adaptation of this 'inspirational novel' fulfilled his script for *Battle Cry* (an ambitious feature film covering every front in World War II), and *Requiem for a Nun*, both of which dealt with the theme of redemption and of individuals asserting a newfound integrity in the midst of history? Faulkner's first draft screenplay has been called 'craftsmanlike' but 'rather dull and sincere, with an abundance of narration'.[13] But his work is superior to the film eventually released starring Humphrey Bogart and Gene Tierney.

Like so much of William Faulkner's life, what was deeply personal and what motivated his writing remain mysterious, one of those 'trade secrets' he begrudgingly confided just once in a letter to his mother in 1925.[14] What Faulkner gave to his work he wanted to stay there, as if to share too much of himself even with his intimates would have robbed him of his powers – forces that had to be kept inside. At all costs, he had to avoid spillage, the leaking out of energies that more properly belonged in the books. Consequently, the biographer, like one of Faulkner's own characters, has to, at some points, speculate in order to complete the story of that character, William Faulkner. With Faulkner, one detects, surmises, infers, imagines, and ratiocinates.

From Hollywood, while working on *The Left Hand of God*, Faulkner wrote to his former lover Joan Williams: 'Fantastic place, fantastic work'. He went at the screenplay in what looks like a Hollywood be damned mood even as this old Hollywood hand of nearly twenty years standing, perfected certain Hollywood/Hawksian conventions.[15]

---

12 http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/books-manuscripts-n09066/lot.259.html.

13 McCarthy, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood*, p. 486.

14 James G. Watson, *Thinking of Home: William Faulkner's Letters to his Mother and Father, 1918–1925* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), p. 196.

15 George Sidney's dissertation, 'Faulkner in Hollywood: A Study of His Career as a Scenarist' (University of New Mexico, 1959), remains a useful study of the tensions inherent in

Faulkner conceived of the film, although set in China, as a Hollywood western: 'Evening after sunset. A small gorge or mountain pass, barren solitary. A rough trail along which pass a column of mounted men and heavy though crudely laden packanimals with their drivers.' The studios wanted audiences to identify with foreign characters and situations as though the world abroad was American. So in the released version of the film, Lee J. Cobb plays a Chinese War lord. Faulkner did not suggest actors for the roles, but in creating Hank, he seemed to have Walter Brennan in mind, one of the stars of two Faulkner scripts, *Banjo on my Knee* and *To Have and Have Not*. Hank is not in Barrett's novel. He is a singular Faulkner creation but also a Hollywood creature. He is the wisecracking sidekick so often employed in the Brennan-Gary Cooper films and, even more notably, for Faulkner's purposes, in the Brennan-John Wayne collaboration in *Red River* (1948), a film Faulkner said Hawks was always trying to remake.[16] After the first appearance of Jim Carmody, comes the 'second white man', Hank, subordinate to Carmody but also his critic, functioning as Brennan does in *Red River* as Wayne's conscience. In one version of the film, Brennan also narrated the story, providing a perspective – by turns serious and comic – on the hero just as Hank does who supports Carmody but also questions his decisions. As for the Chinese, well, they are make do American Indians and even sometimes sound like refugees from Faulkner's script for *Drums Along the Mohawk*.

Without Hank, the released film lacks humor and tension, so that even an actor as great as Humphrey Bogart can seem if not exactly boring, then without enough to do, since he has no one, really, to answer to.[17] Listen to Hank narrate the story and you can hear Walter Brennan taking about China: 'for my nickel you could have had the country and the job both two years ago, and by now even Jim too was going around to that idea'. Soon the Communists would take over the country, but their encroaching power is only an off-camera phenomenon alluded to in the dialogue.

Faulkner's effort to conform to studio standards. See, for example, p. 184: 'Thus twice during his screen writing career Faulkner repudiated Hollywood's 'manual of style', his obligations to his employers, his assumed role – and wrote for himself.' Sidney is referring to *Banjo on my Knee* and *Country Lawyer*, underestimating how many times Faulkner went against Hollywood orthodoxy in *Sutter's Gold*, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and *The Left Hand of God*, although I am not certain Sidney saw Faulkner's adaptation of Barrett's novel.

16 M. Thomas Inge (ed.), *Conversations with William Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), p. 118.

17 Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer: A Biography*, p. 819, mistakenly assumes that Faulkner was 'reunited' with Bogart, but the released film is based on another writer's script, with a different director, long after Faulkner had departed from Hollywood.

Hank's voiceovers are uncommonly long for the screen, but they could have been compressed while retaining his mordant humor. His narrative interludes function like the introductory sections of *Requiem for a Nun*, a draft of which Faulkner was writing on the reverse side of the *Left Hand of God* script.[18] Without Hank's narrative, the released version of film lacks the background necessary to savor Carmody's developing moral consciousness, which he works out under Hank's intense scrutiny.

Jim and Hank are downed pilots now working for a Chinese warload, Yang, their rescuer who will not let them go. They are also in the midst of a civil war trying to avoid 'soviet gangs' who are moving across Yang's territory. When one of Yang's men kills a traveling priest, Carmody whips the murderer across the face – assuming an authority that Yang accords to himself. When Yang orders Carmody to do the same to Hank, the two white men escape, knowing full well that Yang, not daring to lose face, will come after them.

Carmody, wearing the dead priest's clothes, and Hank, dressed as a servant, find refuge in a Catholic mission, which has been expecting the arrival of a priest. Carmody, who has said, 'Religion is for children', is called upon to perform mass, hear confession, administer communion, attend to the dying, and, in general, take care of the mission which becomes his mission – at first only as an effort to save himself but, in the end, to serve humanity. Carmody, for all his reluctance, performs well as a priest inspiring reverence among his congregation – rather like the recalcitrant Nobel laureate who found, to his surprise, that he could fulfill his public responsibilities with considerable success. It had not been easy. 'Billy has gotten so touchy we don't dare mention his fame, and believe me, we edge off. He is so very proud and happy over winning the prize, but is his own shy self about publicity,' his mother explained.[19]

In Faulkner's speeches at his daughter's graduations from high school and college, and in his Nobel address, Faulkner had insisted the world could change only if individuals, one by one, changed themselves and protested injustice. Carmody mentions he was an altar boy but is now a lapsed Catholic, and the dying priest replies, 'There is no such thing.' He might as well say, as Gavin Stevens does in *Requiem for a Nun*, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past.' Although Carmody jokes when he calls himself 'an American

18 Gleeson-White, *William Faulkner at Twentieth Century-Fox: The Annotated Screenplays*, p. 923; Stefan Solomon, *William Faulkner in Hollywood: Screenwriting for the Studios* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), p. 13–14 and 197–98.

19 Maud Falkner to Sallie Burns, January 16, 1951, Carvel Collins Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

white devil' when rejecting the attentions of a courtesan, he regards himself as unredeemed.

What matters, however, is Carmody's courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Hank has injured himself in an avalanche – an episode not in the novel – and cannot walk. When they arrive at the village mission, Hank explains why he serves Carmody. Earlier, after their plane crashed: 'It must have taken him days to keep me alive and still get me down that mountain to where he could find help. I don't know how he did it.' But Carmody has not yet figured out how to save himself. That the mission welcomes Carmody as a priest becomes less significant, ultimately, than his understanding that their faith in God and humanity is what will redeem him. When the village comes to Carmody he is so moved that he kneels to them – a spontaneous gesture that Hank is sure came as a surprise: 'I don't guess he knew why, either. But it was the right thing to do. It was exactly right. It was as if the Lord himself was taking care of him – of us –.' The 'us' is everyone, white and Chinese alike, and Carmody's spontaneous submission to his fate, to saving the village, seems like a gift of grace, not an action of his own volition. Was Faulkner thinking of the grace he had shown in the Nobel ceremony, the deft pirouetting that his lover Else Jonsson noticed – not aware that this was the same man who had doused himself with liquor in the days approaching the Nobel event. When Faulkner said the award was not just to him, he meant it. Accepting the prize signified that he could no longer go it alone, as he had done so often in Hollywood, in New York, at home, acting as his own soldier of fortune.

By all accounts, Faulkner's presence at Stockholm inspired awe. In *The Left Hand of God*, Anne, a devout Catholic and the wife of a lost American pilot (presumed dead) watches Carmody perform as Father O'Shea, and exults: 'Never in my life did a Mass move me as that one did. He was so deliberate – so reverent – so sincere. It was as though it could go on forever....' She is speaking of a moment but also of eternity and universality, the very terms of Faulkner's Nobel sermon. The Communists in the film are described as godless – not only in the disbelieving sense but in their obliteration of individuality, which Faulkner deplored in his anti-Communist speeches.

Carmody is Faulkner in character: 'The whole Chinese family is watching him with the same air of complete trust. He sees the family and speaks to them in the hill dialect, indicating that he is learning even something of that.' Hill dialect? That is precisely the dialect used in Faulkner's patriotic short stories such as 'Shall Not Perish', written during World War II. That Faulkner had an impact similar to Carmody's is undeniable. Perrin H. Lowrey Jr., writing to a Faulkner friend while Faulkner was in Hollywood working on *The Left Hand of God*, testified that 'as a young writer, I wanted to tell someone close to him how

much his speech of acceptance in Stockholm meant to those of us who are trying to turn out something good. The dignity and selflessness and awareness of that speech must have been particularly meaningful and encouraging to all the young writers of my generation.... So I wanted him to know ... I simply wanted to thank him for doing so generous and so fine a thing.'[20] Faulkner had to know through other aspiring writers such as Joan Williams and Shelby Foote, and many others that his words inspired generations of writers.

Hank who has kidded Carmody all along, calling him 'Father', admits 'something has happened to you'. Carmody concurs: 'something happened to me. I don't even know myself what it was. Yes, I do know – an old Buddhist priest – a man dying of leprosy – a woman dying in childbirth who held my hand and believed in me while she died – the patience, the suffering, the hope, but above all the trust – You see, I can't tell you,' he says to Dr. Marvin, the priest who comes to relieve Carmody after he has saved the mission. Like the marshal (Gary Cooper) in *High Noon*, one of Faulkner's favorite pictures, Carmody is full of doubt but acts so as to save himself and the community.[21]

Carmody deals with the head villain, Yang, one-to-one. Carmody proposes a throw of the dice. If Carmody wins, the mission is saved. If Carmody loses, Yang will withdraw from the village but at the price of enslaving Carmody. Before they roll, though, Carmody says he has already won, telling Yang why the warlord will lose: 'if I stood the torture well, people would say that I was stronger than Mieh Yang, since he could not break me. And if I stood it badly, they would marvel that such a weak man commanded your troops. They would wonder if maybe you too were not weak.' Yang concedes to Carmody and withdraws his threat against the mission.

William Faulkner's *Left Hand of God* never got made because of production code violations and the Catholic Church's opposition.[22] Even with his redemption, Carmody, in Faulkner's script, was too unsavory for the production code, which forbid, for example, scenes with a character pretending to be a priest and actually performing holy services. After two decades in Hollywood Faulkner knew that his mixture of the profane and the sacred could

20 Lowrey to Phil Stone, February 28, 1951, in: Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin (eds.), *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, The Letters, Volume 2*, p. 63.

21 The film was not released until July 1952, but I think the reason Faulkner liked it is because it accorded with his redemptive vision in *The Left Hand of God*. D.J. Treia and Rodger L. Tarr, *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).

22 Solomon, *William Faulkner in Hollywood: Screenwriting for the Studios*, p. 204.

never be approved. His best screenplays, as I show elsewhere in my biography, were ambitious in scope, but since he could not control their production, he also could not take full ownership of his Hollywood achievements.

For a writer customarily viewed as fiercely independent and even recalcitrant, Faulkner's collaborative work in Hollywood, especially with Howard Hawks and his actors, is a revelation casting significant light on his later fiction, in which his characters collaborate in creating the communal narrative history of Yoknapatawpha, a history he also brought to Hollywood in scripts like 'War Birds' and 'Country Lawyer', which extended the range of his mythical county beyond what is essayed in his novels and stories.

In an essay on Faulkner biography, published in 2004, Kevin Railey called for a new biography of Faulkner that would emphasize not the monument to a great writer established by Joseph Blotner and his successors, but rather a biography that would 'renounce its affiliation with the myth of the coherent personality and explore the ways in which subjects are many-sided and multifarious entities'.[23] That Faulkner – agile and adaptable – is the figure I track in my biography.

23 For a chapter-length study of the 'Monument of the Famous Writer', focusing on Blotner, see Dennis W. Petrie, *Ultimately Fiction: Design in Modern American Literary Biography* (Purdue University Press, West Lafayette 1981), p. 59–110; 'Biographical Criticism', in: *A Companion to Faulkner Studies*, ed. Charles A. Peek and Robert W. Hamblin, Greenwood Press, High Wycombe 2004, p. 98. Railey's is the single best essay-length discussion of Faulkner biography. Also of great value is Mary Phyfer Gillis's Ph.D dissertation: *Faulkner's Biographies: Life, Art, and the Poetics of Biography*, The University of Alabama, 2002.

Capturing the Subject: Virginia Woolf's Battle with Biographical Boundaries

Emma McEwin

'There's no trifling with words – can't be done, not when they're to stand 'forever', wrote Virginia Woolf while in the throes of trying to 'despatch' *Flush*, her biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Cocker Spaniel.[1] As a novelist and biographer, as an essayist, diarist, and critic, she was constantly exploring and experimenting with what makes a literary work resonate and endure. Her primary quest, in both fiction and biography, was to capture, in writing, the essence of human character, which she alternately referred to as personality, reality, 'the spirit we live by, life itself'.[2] This entailed achieving a seamless fusion of personality and 'truth' (or fact), to produce a self-contained whole. Woolf contended that this could only be effected if the work were entirely governed by the writer's creative vision through the adoption of an androgynous mind, which she characterised as incandescent, adaptable and fluid, and undistracted by all impediments – the ego, awareness of one's sex, and deference to the opinion of others.[3]

Woolf recognised that this was difficult to achieve in fiction and near impossible in biography, essentially because reality is 'something very erratic, something very undependable', and because communicating it requires reconciling contradictory principles.[4] She argues that a novelist's concern with tracing the development of feelings and of lives over time, is 'incompatible with design and order', with having to 'provide a plot', conform to a particular genre, and provide 'an air of probability embalming the whole'.[5] In biography, she maintains that 'truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible'.[6] Only by finding a means of balancing these opposing forces can a

1 Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Persephone Books, 2012), 21 January 1933, p. 194.

2 Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,' in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981), p. 111.

3 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1977), p. 96–99.

4 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 104.

5 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 104; Virginia Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction,' in *Granite and Rainbow* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958): p. 143; Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction,' in *The Common Reader, Second Series* (Adelaide: eBooks@Adelaide, 2004).

6 Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography,' in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Collected Essays IV* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 234.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_015

novelist or biographer be complete. She concedes that the biographer's task is more challenging because he is answerable to the guardians of the subject's life and reputation, and because his vision can always be checked against verifiable facts.[7] Yet, Woolf felt that biography was becoming more adaptable to narrative forms and showing an interest in subjectivity. She was writing in a period of transition, in the first half of the twentieth century, with the rise of psychological theory, with the emancipation of women, and in the aftermath of World War I, and she sensed that her generation was on the cusp of a freer, more open society. Sensing this, she called for new approaches, in both fiction and biography, to communicate the modern sensibility. Even as she recognised that the limitations of the genre were perhaps insurmountable, as a theorist and practising biographer (and auto biographer) herself, whose own experiments in biography were always exploratory, she advocated never ceasing to explore innovative ways in which the self might be known and with how lives might be written by testing the limits of biographical form.

Woolf's methodology was predicated on the belief that facts are not fixed but change with the times and with shifting values.[8] Her practice, therefore, partly involved exposing the inadequacies of the Victorian biographical tradition embodied in *The National Dictionary of Biography*, of which her father, Leslie Stephen and his successor, Sidney Lee, were leading proponents. Patriarchal, conventional, censoring and censorious, characterised by a reverence for facts, 'dominated by the idea of goodness,' and based on the premise that lives are expressed in visible deeds rather than in thoughts and emotions, it represented to Woolf, 'artistic wrongheadedness'.[9] The truthful depiction of inner lives was perceived as counter to the role of professional biography, which was to promote and to preserve reputations. Woolf called for an end to 'the draperies and decencies' of such biography and a return to the kind that James Boswell had practised, marked by an equal interest in illustrious as well as sedentary lives and in portraying both external and internal experience, as well as an ability to select, synthesise and manipulate facts to draw out the humanity of the subject.[10]

Woolf was among several writers of the time who were expressing a new self-consciousness about the genre. Many were practising (and experimenting) biographers, who were also reflecting and speculating on the form in

7 Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction,' in *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 143.

8 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Collected Essays IV* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 226.

9 Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 231.

10 Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 230.

critical and theoretical works. Central to most of these works was an acknowledgement of the increasingly novelistic features of biography. The 'new' biography, of whom Virginia Woolf, Harold Nicolson, Lytton Strachey, and Edmund Gosse before them, were practitioners, was a mixture of autobiography and biography and borrowed many fictional techniques.[11] In 1927, a year before Woolf's *Orlando* was published, Harold Nicolson predicted that biography and fiction would merge[12] and that the blurring of genres would result in 'a new scope, an unexplored method of conveying human experience'.[13]

Candour was the guiding principle of the new biography, licensing biographers to produce what Woolf called 'the creative fact' by drawing illuminating connections between the public and the secret self.[14] In this way, they became not mere recorders but interpreters of lives. Greater open-mindedness, and the changed 'accent on sex', had allowed biographers to sweep aside the hypocrisy and prudery of their predecessors and relate to their subjects on an equal footing; they no longer revere them, describing their merits as well as their flaws, but nor do they judge them according to any 'standard of courage or morality'.[15] From this new perspective, the complexity of personality was acknowledged.

Because she felt that biography had 'won a measure of freedom,' as a reviewer, Woolf is critical of writers who fail to exercise these 'new liberties',[16] and commends those who take advantage of them. She laments Edmund Gosse's lack of courage in *Father and Son*. Held back by 'his respect for decorum, and by his decency,' his portraits lack depth.[17] She declares E.M. Forster's life of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson 'quite futile' for not including Lowes Dickinson's homosexuality.[18] On the other hand, she praises Lytton Strachey for daring to exercise 'independent judgment' and a selective eye to produce a truthful depiction of his subjects in *Eminent Victorians*, namely

11 Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 233.

12 Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927), p. 155–156.

13 Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography*, p. 158.

14 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 228.

15 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography,' in *CEIV*, p. 228; Woolf, 'The Art of Biography,' in *CEIV*, 226; Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 232.

16 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 223.

17 Woolf, 'Edmund Gosse,' in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Collected Essays IV*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 83–84.

18 Qtd in Hermione Lee, 'Biomythographers: Rewriting the Lives of Virginia Woolf,' *Essays in Criticism*, 46 (1996)2, p. 105.

Florence Nightingale, Cardinal Manning, Thomas Arnold and General Gordon, all of whom had previously been the subject of glowing biographies. Similarly, she applauds Harold Nicolson for showing, in *Some People* (consisting of nine character-sketches), that 'a little fiction mixed with fact can be made to transmit personality very effectively'.[19] Yet, it is a delicate balancing act rarely entirely mastered. Just as Gosse's reticence results in 'superficial,' portraits, Nicolson's use of irony 'stunts' the growth of his subjects and Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, all subjected to a thorough debunking, border on caricatures.[20]

Woolf nevertheless endorses risk taking; far better to be adventurous than cautious. *Elizabeth and Essex* she declares 'a failure' because Strachey had allowed his imagination free rein on encountering a period of Queen Elizabeth's life that lacked 'authentic information'.[21] She recognises the tension between retaining factual integrity and the desire to invent, but sees the truth as indispensable. However, Strachey had dared to experiment, and thus his biography is deemed of value in opening up possible future directions for the genre.[22] While Woolf's reviews indicate that she remained largely unsatisfied with the solutions to 'the problem' of biography, *Queen Victoria*, seems the closest example of a resolution to the biographical tensions which perplexed her.[23] Though not a seamless fusion of truth and personality, for Strachey's effort is visible, Strachey, she notes, had somehow both succumbed to the genre's limitations, and, also managed to freely express his own point of view.[24]

However, as Nigel Hamilton concedes, 'there was general confusion regarding what exactly should replace the moral, uplifting agenda of the Victorians,' and this perhaps partly explains why Woolf evades rather than confronts the obstacles intrinsic to conventional biography by writing her first book-length biography, *Orlando*, in novel form.[25] Published in 1928, *Orlando* is a playful bio-

19 Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,' in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, p. 109; Woolf, 'The Art of Biography,' in *CEIV*, p. 233; It has been pointed out that because *Some People* consists of nine character sketches, not all of whom are based on real people, it is not a good example of the 'new' biography.

20 Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 233; Woolf, 'The Art of Biography,' in *CEIV*, p. 223.

21 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 225.

22 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 226.

23 Woolf, 'The New Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 229.

24 Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, p. 109.

25 Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 164.

graphy of Vita Sackville-West in which the subject, Orlando, breaks free from the constraints of age and time, of gender and of perspective by living over a period of more than 300 years, first as a man and then as a woman. In being so fantastical, *Orlando* can be seen as a response to this confusion as well as a reaction against the literary standards set by the biographical fathers. Indeed, Maria DiBattista suggests that *Orlando*'s playfulness stems from 'an aggressive impulse directed against all she [Woolf] perceives as threatening to the integrity and freedom of the self.'[26]

While biography 'remained at an impasse' because its authors were afraid of falling foul of censors,' writing about Vita Sackville-West under the veil of a novel and behind the guise of a narrator/biographer, Woolf was protected from the laws of libel.[27] Furthermore, *Orlando* was sanctioned by Sackville-West, whose response to the proposal of a book about her and her love affairs, was that she hold nothing back: 'Go ahead, toss up your pancake, brown it nicely on both sides, pour brandy over it, and serve hot'.[28]

By living through four centuries and transgressing gender, *Orlando* can be seen as the embodiment of the whole vision to which Woolf aspires; the desire to consume all impediments by dissolving divisions between chronological time and conscious time, between past and present, public and private, masculine and feminine. This ideal is realised in Orlando's seamless transition from man to woman, and in the fact that her character remains the same. Orlando's biographer notes that 'the change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it.'[29] When she reunites with the poet, Nick Greene, Greene accepts her with the same ease – 'he looked at her, remembered her; recognised her.'[30]

Orlando is both a portrait of Vita-Sackville West, and a treatise on biography in which Woolf questions the genre's ability to express a life truthfully and fully. By writing a novel and calling it a biography (the full title is *Orlando: A Biography*), Woolf highlights the blurred boundary between fact and fiction, and the gap between the lived life and the written life, not usually made expli-

26 Maria DiBattista, qtd. in Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*, (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. 118.

27 Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History*, p. 155.

28 Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 11 October 1927, in: Louise De Salvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (eds.), *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 252.

29 Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, (London: Grafton Books, 1989), p. 87.

30 Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 73.

cit in conventional biography. The self-conscious narrator/ biographer, implied as male, regularly intercepts the story to speculate on the limitations of biography and on the difficulty of capturing a life. He concedes that it is difficult to ascertain the truth when faced with gaps in the evidence and conflicting testimonies, and so points to the inevitability of interpretation and speculation. When Orlando changes sex, he acknowledges that 'no one has ever known exactly what took place' making it necessary to 'speculate, to surmise and even to use the imagination.'[31]

Significantly, when Orlando becomes a woman, the biographer is unable to continue with the narrative; he can do nothing but sit still, blow his nose, stir the fire and wait for something to happenbecause, as a woman, her life has not traditionally been played out in the public sphere and therefore cannot be defined by exploit.[32] Woolf was responding to the Victorian scale of judgement, exemplified in Sidney Lee's assertion that 'the life of a nonentity or a mediocrity, however skilfully contrived, conflicts with primary biographic principles.'[33] Thus, she raises the question of how to write the lives of women, and other 'forgotten worthies' without historical records on which to base them, and in the absence of a literary tradition.[34] She protests against women's disenfranchisement from the annals of history by symbolically re-empowering Sackville-West in *Orlando* by returning to her the ancestral home which she could not inherit in real life because she was a woman. Furthermore, by writing the novel as a parody, Woolf resists the temptation to express anger at the unfair treatment of her sex and so supresses the ego. As she argues in *A Room of One's Own*, Charlotte Bronte's rage in *Jane Eyre*, prevents her from expressing her genius 'whole and entire.'[35]

In *Orlando*, Woolf was serious in wanting to capture the essence and the complexity of Vita Sackville-West. She noted in her diary that 'the balance between truth and fantasy must be very careful.'[36] Historical accuracy was important to her; many details about Sackville-West's personality (embodied in Orlando), such as her androgyny and her promiscuity, her prolificacy as a writer, as well as details about her heritage, are accurate. Similarly, in *Flush*, a spoof biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her courtship with Robert Browning, told from the perspective of Barrett-Browning's pet span-

31 Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 82; Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 75.
32 Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 167.
33 Qtd in Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography*, p. 146.
34 Woolf, 'The Lives of the Obscure,' in *CEIV*, p. 125.
35 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 67.
36 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 20 December 1927, p. 120.

iel, which was published five years later, fidelity to the facts was important,[37] and also maintaining the right balance: 'What I must do is to keep control; & not be too sarcastic; & keep the right degree of freedom & reserve, she says.[38] In gesturing towards an understanding of canine subjectivity and of how lives might be perceived outside of human consciousness, and by extending her attempt to collapse hierarchies between men and women and the great and the obscure to that between humans and animals, she explores alternative ways of accessing a life. Yet, just as *Orlando* offered 'a writer's holiday'[39] after *To the Lighthouse*, Flush was undertaken as something 'light and easy and untroubling'after the intensity of *The Waves*.[40]

While her artistic intentions were serious in both books, Woolf frequently discounts both *Orlando* and *Flush* as significant works. She dismisses *Flush* as 'a silly book,' and says of *Orlando*, 'I did not try to explore. And must I always explore? Yes I think so still.'[41] She admits that *Orlando* had taught her about the mechanics of writing and constructing a plot but also 'how to keep the realities at bay'; she acknowledges having 'purposely avoided of course any other difficulty', adding: 'I never got down to my depths and made squares shape up'.[42] *Orlando* was written with ease and spontaneity, but she concedes that 'those qualities were largely the result of ignoring the others, and of writing 'exteriorly'.[43] Such observations indicate that the harmonious fusion of inner and outer reality that she sought had not been achieved by making a leap in genre and writing biography as fiction. Irony 'as a permanent filter was a dead end for biography,' argues Nigel Hamilton, and, though 'well-received,', *Orlando*, 'like *Eminent Victorians*... offered no real way forward for print biographers'.[44] And Woolf seems to have recognised this. 'The more complex a vision the less it lends itself to satire', she observed in her diary, noting that neither Shakespeare nor Dostoevsky satirise, two writers whose greatness, she argues, lies in their ability to reveal the inner life.[45]

---

37 Flush was based on letters between Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning and incidents such as Flush's kidnapping, really happened.

38 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 19 December 1932, p. 190.

39 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 18 March 1928, p. 177.

40 Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Volume 2, Mrs Woolf, 1912–1941* (Frogmore, St Albans: Triad/ Paladin, 1976), p. 160.

41 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 28 April 1933, p. 199; Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 7 November 1928, p. 136.

42 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 7 November 1928, p. 136.

43 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 28 November 1928, p. 139.

44 Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History*, p. 162.

45 Virginia Woolf, 'More Dostoevsky,' in Mary Lyon (ed.), *Books and Portraits*, (London: Triad Grafton 1979), p. 142.

1 'Trying' Biography

Flush was followed by a formal biography of her friend, the artist and art critic, Roger Fry. When Margery Fry, one of Roger Fry's five sisters, and his long-time partner, Helen Anrep, commissioned her to write it, Woolf confided to her diary: 'Here's the chance of trying biography: a splendid, difficult chance… that is, if I *am* free.'[46] This suggests that she recognised that 'trying biography' for real lay in contriving a means of freely expressing her own vision of a biographical subject, in this case, Roger Fry, by confronting the challenges inherent in the genre rather than by evading them as she had in *Orlando* and *Flush*.

However, from the outset, she was not free. It began in circumstances ripe for one of the 'protective lives' of the late nineteenth century that she so deplored.[47] On a visit to Woolf on 21 November 1934, Margery Fry claimed, on the one hand, that she wanted her [Woolf] 'to be quite free' but on the other, she set restrictions in wanting to discuss Fry's letters after Woolf had read them, and in warning her 'to be careful' where the family was concerned.[48] This left Woolf unsure of how to proceed, and writing under the supervisory eyes of the Frys would remain a persistent obstacle. A few years into the biography, she records in her diary that 'all books now seem to me surrounded by a circle of invisible censors'.[49] In the same entry, she wonders whether Wordsworth was ever troubled by censors. As she longs to break free of them herself, knowing that she cannot otherwise get to the reality of Fry's character, she marvels at his poem 'Ruth,' for 'its unconsciousness' and 'its lack of distraction'.[50]

Roger Fry took Woolf more than five years to complete and it is well known that she found it difficult. While *Orlando* had taken her just six months to write and had been easily conceived, unleashing in her a flood of ideas and transporting her to a state of 'the greatest rapture' she had ever known,[51] *Roger Fry*, had a sterilising, diminishing effect on her creatively. How she could ever 'make a life out of six cardboard boxes full of tailor bills, love letters and old

46 Virginia Woolf in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV: 1931–1935*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982), 12 November 1934, p. 260.

47 Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 58.

48 Virginia Woolf, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV: 1932–1935*, 21 November 1934, p. 133.

49 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 7 August 1939, p. 315.

50 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 7 August 1939, p. 315.

51 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 22 October 1927, p. 117.

picture postcards,' left her totally flummoxed.[52] Even before she had started writing, she viewed it as 'donkey work,' and approached it with a sense of foreboding: 'What a time it'll take – what difficulties there'll be', she complained in a letter to her friend Ethel Smyth.[53] In her diary, she writes of being 'strung into a ball with *Roger*'; of how the 'grind' of writing his life made her 'head spin'; and her eyes 'ache.'[54] She frequently questions her ability to write the biography, and as if dooming herself to failure, she describes working with 'diseased' pens, a 'defective' nib.[55]

Despite advocating that biographers exercise their right to 'independent judgement,' she proved a tentative, guarded biographer who struggled to reconcile her vision of Fry, not only with the relatives, but also with the facts and with her own need for discretion. She could not see how to align the facts with her theories, or how to write about Roger Fry's love affairs. She makes no reference to his affair with her sister Vanessa Bell despite Bell's approval.[56] The death of Fry's first wife, artist Helen Coombe, who was committed to a mental asylum ten years into their marriage, is recorded in a footnote. Furthermore, she felt unqualified to write about his art, feeling inhibited by both Duncan Grant and her sister, Vanessa Bell.[57] Michael Shapiro observes that, although he was an artist, which was more important to him than his work as an art critic and lecturer, 'we learn more about Fry's easels than about his paintings'.[58] Michael Rosenthal concludes that by not exploring Fry's emotional life and most significant relationships, Woolf fails to achieve a seamless fusion of fact and fiction, which she herself purported was the aim of the new biography.[59] Elizabeth Cooley goes a step further in arguing that Woolf performed 'a peculiar double failure,' by remaining within the limits of biographical form as set out by the Victorians yet not producing the two-volume

52 Qtd in Leon Edel, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York: Norton, 1984), p. 19.

53 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 5 May 1938, 291; Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 9 December 1934, in Nigel Nicholson and Joanna Trautmann (eds.), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932–1935* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p. 352.

54 Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 6 October 1938, p. 304.

55 Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 5 May 1938, p. 291.

56 Qtd in Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Volume Two, Mrs Woolf, 1912–1941*, (Frogmore, St Albans: Triad/ Paladin, 1976), p. 182–183.

57 Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 26 April 1927, in: Nigel Nicholson and Joanna Trautmann (eds.), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1923–1928* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p. 367.

58 Michael Shapiro, 'Roger Fry: A Biography,' *Modernism Lab*, n.d., modernism.courseresource.yale.edu/2017/07/28/roger-fry-a-biography/.

59 Michael Rosenthal, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 215–16.

tome for which they were known, and by not allowing 'her invention and intuition full play'.[60]

When the manuscript was finished, Leonard Woolf criticised her for choosing 'the wrong method', describing it as 'merely analysis, not history', deploring 'all those dead quotations'.[61] Woolf is inclined to believe that the book is a failure, but then wonders whether Leonard 'is himself on the wrong tack' due to a 'lack of interest in personality'.[62] Thomas S.W. Lewis points out that she never intended the book to be the kind of biography that Leonard seemed to expect; one focused on facts and deeds. Rather, her objective was to push the boundaries of biographical form to try and capture Fry from multiple angles.[63]

There is much evidence to indicate that throughout the writing of the biography, she persisted in experimenting with structure and style, and with how best to access Fry and bring out his complexity. Interestingly, her impulse, in the first instance was to turn to fiction, evidenced in a sketch entitled 'Roger Fry: A Series of Impressions', which is not dated but is estimated to have been written before she first started reading for the full-length biography in 1936.[64] It is less the impressions than the accompanying explanation of her aesthetic that is of most interest, revealing her skepticism about the ability of factual biography to convey the inner life. She explains that she felt unable to write about Fry's work from a critical perspective and had therefore aimed for a portrait of him 'in which fiction was allowed full play – the idea being that it was only by having full liberty to invent and create that a true life could be written.'[65] Throughout the writing of *Roger Fry*, she periodically contemplates resorting to a fictional representation of the facts, as she struggles to find a way to freely express her vision of him within the constraints of factual biography.[66]

---

60 Elizabeth Cooley, 'Revolutionizing Biography: 'Orlando,' 'Roger Fry,' and the Tradition', *South Atlantic Review*, 55, no. 2 (1990): p. 81.

61 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 20 March 1939, p. 328.

62 Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 20 March 1940, p. 328.

63 Thomas S.W. Lewis, 'Combining 'The Advantages of Fact and Fiction': Virginia Woolf's Biographies of Vita Sackville-West, Flush and Roger Fry', in: Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb (eds.), *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays* (Troy, New York: The Whiston Publishing Company, 1983): p. 320.

64 Jocelyn Bartkevicius, 'A Form of One's Own: Virginia Woolf's Art of the Portrait Essay', *The Iowa Review*, 22(1992)1, p. 123, doi: 129.127.145.240.

65 Bartkevicius, 'A Form of One's Own: Virginia Woolf's Art of the Portrait Essay', p. 129.

66 Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 3 May 1938, Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV, 1929–1931*, p. 226; Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 28 August 1938, p. 301.

Just as she attests that 'the biographer must be prepared to admit contradictory versions of the same face,' in order to bring about 'a richer unity',[67] she consistently searches for a form that would allow her to produce a many-sided portrait of Fry. Before being asked to write the biography, she conceived of a composite work with contributions from people who had known him in different contexts and at different times of his life, including her nephew Julian Bell, that she would then bring together with Desmond MacCarthy.[68] Although this did not happen and she became the sole author, part of her method involved collecting memories from people who knew Fry, and considering what narrative approach to adopt; whether 'to speak oneself or let him speak' – and how to combine the different voices.'[69] Structurally, she favoured an impressionistic, thematic approach, considering at one stage, beginning at the end of Fry's life and working back, 'giv[ing] specimen days, all through his life'.[70] Something 'lesser and slighter', not 'a whole big life' was her aim and she kept this in mind. It was important to avoid a big, 'literal book, and to 'somehow loosen and shorten'.[71] This is in keeping with one of the key features of the new biography, which was its smaller size, challenging conventional biography's claim that the length of a biography, in 'the usual two volumes,' is equated with truth and greater coverage of a life.[72]

Woolf's letters to friends after the publication of *Roger Fry* indicate that she was aspiring towards the kind of biography that she advocated in her essays, and that she felt that she had achieved her objective. Encouraged by her brother-in-law, Clive Bell's approval, she confessed, 'I'd been haunted by the fact that I'd not brought out Roger's qualities'.[73] The biography had been what she described as 'an experiment in self-suppression; a gamble in R's power to transmit himself' and although it had been difficult and she had not expected it to work, she felt that she had 'succeeded.'[74] Diane Gillespie suggests that

67 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *CEIV*, p. 226.

68 Diane F. Gillespie (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Roger Fry: A Biography* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. xiii.

69 Virginia Woolf to R.C. Trevelyan, 11 September 1938, in Nigel Nicholson and Joanna Trautmann (ed.), *Leave the letters Till We're Dead, The Letters* of *Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936–1941* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), p. 271.

70 Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV: 1929–1931*, 16 December 1935, p. 358.

71 Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, 9 December 1934, *The letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932–1935*, p. 352.

72 Woolf, 'The New Biography,' in *CEIV*, p. 231.

73 Virginia Woolf to Clive Bell, 6 August 1940, *Leave the letters Till We're Dead, The Letters* of *Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936–1941*, p. 410.

74 Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth 19 March 1940, *Leave the letters Till We're Dead, The Letters* of *Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936–1941*, p. 147.

while this perhaps indicates her reticence, and desire not to offend friends and family members, it could also be interpreted as a refusal 'to play the traditional intrusive biographer's role, mocked in *Orlando*.'[75] Certainly, this is consistent with her belief that for a work to be whole, the narrating 'I' must not be visible. Those she identifies as great writers, including James Boswell, achieve this feat of detachment.[76]

Writing Fry's life was neither pleasurable, nor easy, but Woolf was well aware that biography is 'difficult,' as she frequently stresses in her letters, essays and diaries. In 'How Should One Read a Book?', she concedes that readers will always favour one kind of writer over another, and that 'sometimes this natural antagonism is too great to be overcome, but the trial is always worth making'.[77] This same philosophy might be applied to her experience of 'trying' biography, as a writer more inclined towards fiction. It is the very fact of it being barely achievable, that seems to have driven her to persist with *Roger Fry*: 'I…see dimly such a masterpiece that cant [sic] be painted that on I go.'[78]

Despite recognising that her generation was entering a new age in biography, specifically, one free of censorship, that she herself helped to usher in, Virginia Woolf, was unable to fully explore the possibilities of the genre. The fear of libel was a very real obstacle. Her portrait of Vita Sackville-West in *Orlando* was arguably only made possible through satire. This, together with her own sense of discretion, perhaps a reflection of her inability to completely deny her literary heritage, as well as her underlying skepticism of the capability of factual biography to portray the reality of character, were all impediments she struggled to overcome.

In 'The Art of Biography,' she notes that the revolution in biography coincided with the development of new media; that she and her contemporaries were living 'in an age when a thousand cameras are pointed, by newspapers, letters, and diaries, at every character from every angle.'[79] The twenty-first century is characterised by even greater exposure of lives, not only through

---

75 Gillespie (ed.), 'Introduction,' in Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography*, p. xI.

76 Woolf, 'The New Biography,' in *CEIV*, p. 230; Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction,' in *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 116.

77 Virginia Woolf, 'How Should One Read a Book?', *Yale Review*, 89(2001)1, p. 46, doi: 10.1111/0044-0124.00468.

78 Interestingly, she defines a masterpiece as 'something said once and for all, stated, finished, so that it's there complete in the mind' in a letter to Ethel Smyth, 1 January 1933, in Woolf, *The letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V, 1932–1935*, p. 143–144; Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 8 October 1938, *Leave the letters Till We're Dead, The Letters* of *Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936–1941*, p. 285.

79 Woolf, 'The Art of Biography,' in *CEIV*, p. 226.

photography and print media but also through blogs, social network sites, documentaries, biographical films, Reality TV, and tabloid talk shows, bringing private revelation into the public domain, ostensibly expanding the possibilities for biographical expression. Yet, has it enlarged its scope or diminished it? 'The test of a book (to a writer)', Woolf declared in her diary, is 'if it makes a space in which, quite naturally, you can say what you want to say.'[80] But can writers ever be completely free? With almost unlimited access to personal information, this has brought other considerations for the genre, such as the ethics of telling the lives of others, and the danger of private revelation becoming an end in itself, rather than facilitating the full portrait to which Woolf aspired. It is doubtful that she, herself the subject of many biographies, is as well-known as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century as she is as a woman who suffered from depression and madness and who took her own life by drowning.

80 Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1925–1930*, 17 March 1930, p. 297.

PART 3

Dossier on Microhistory

∴

In the following dossier some competing views on microhistory are presented, that find their origin in a theoretical perspective on historiography. A lot has been written about microhistory, but a satisfying conclusion about its significance apparently cannot be made. It is striking that Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó published together a book about microhistory, although it now appears that they did not agree at all about this subject.[1] The editors of *Fear of Theory* decided not only to publish the polemic between these two scholars, but also wanted to bring the discussion a little bit further.

In Biography Studies, namely, microhistory plays an important role for other reasons than those treated by Magnússon and Szijártó. Renders and Veltman argue that during the last forty years, microhistory has developed in different phases. In the late 1970s, there was the introduction of Italian microhistory by Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni. After that, their theoretical views were incorporated into those of the *Annales* school, the historians of the *longue durée*, Jacques Le Goff and Fernand Braudel.

From the 21st Congress of Historical Sciences (CIS) conference in 2010 onwards, representatives of the first wave started a discussion with later the-

1 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London: Routlegde, 2013).

orists. Under the chairmanchip and with the approval of Giovanni Levi (first wave) and Matti Peltonen (second wave), we elaborated on the primary ideas of microhistory to embrace new perspectives on microhistory that were called the 'third wave' at the time. The publication of *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* in 2014, in which Ginzburg, Levi and Peltonen cooperated, was the result of this discussion. In essence, this third phase is about the question on the representativeness of microhistory vis à vis the Great Historical Narrative. The difference with earlier concepts is that in microhistory, the so called case study is no longer regarded as an appropriate form.[2] As an example of this new insight, we commented in the introduction of *Theoretical Discussions* upon the famous book *Montailliou*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. It '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.'

In recent years, this new element has led to the introduction of microhistory in the toolbox of the biographer. Time and again, the biographical investigation asks: how representative is this person or this event in the context of its period?[3] This question is related to the argument raised by Szijártó about the role of agency in historiography. You can read it all in the four following essays. How differently people think about microhistory, the authors agree that no consensus has been established. They are adamant that the debate and clash of opinions could lead to new perspectives.

2 Hans Renders, 'The Limits of Representativeness', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 129–138.

3 Hans Renders, 'Exceptions that Prove the Rule: Biography, Microhistory, and Marginals in Dutch Cities', in Binne de Haan and Konstantin Mierau (eds.), *Microhistory and the Picaresque novel: a first exploration into commensurable perspectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). I have used parts of this hard-to-reach publication below.

The Representativeness of a Reputation: A 'Third Wave' in Microhistory

Hans Renders and David Veltman

In popular history books, the individual perspective is often chosen as a point of departure to describe a historical development or phenomenon. But the personal is not the only determining factor in history. Attention should also be paid to the way in which a public representation can be explained or interpreted from the perspective of the personal. Autobiographical sources can be one way to explain a reputation, but the biographer has the freedom to bring other sources into play. Thus, the historical significance of an individual becomes the subject of critical investigation, enabling the biographer to contextualize history in a new manner.

Indeed, the individual enjoys a certain freedom within the boundaries of the social structure in which he is active. But this structure is also continuously evolving and contradicting itself. Therefore, Magnússon argues that microhistory should acknowledge that the agency of the individual cannot be predicted: it is in a constant flux, not making use of well-defined concepts, but of 'minor' or 'local' knowledge.[1] A close reading of the available knowledge can help the microhistorian to examine the mentality of the individual. In order to get a clear, uncontradictory view of this mentality, one should limit himself to this small research unit.[2]

We would like to argue that in microhistory different fields of knowledge can be related to each other, not only the knowledge that was available to the writer of autobiographical accounts. The 'method of clues' has often been regarded as the starting point of microhistory. The microhistorian searches for 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.

1 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, 'Minor knowledge. Microhistory, Scribal Communities, and the Importance of Institutional Structures', in: *Quaderni storici* 47(2012)140, p. 495–524.

2 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, 'The life is never over. Biography as a microhistorical approach', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan en Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017) p. 42–52.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_016

Microhistory, as it was introduced in the 1970s and 80s by the Italian historians Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, was seen as one of the methodological alternatives to the relativist historiography of the day. According to them, historical research had become a rhetorical or aesthetic activity, too dependent on the available written records of the events they describe. Instead, microhistory wanted to focus on the events themselves. The agency of the individual, they argued, could be explained from the perspective of a constant negotiation, manipulation and choices people had to make in a normative reality.[3] Ginzburg and Poni therefore chose marginal people, outlaws even, as the subject of their investigation: these subjects could shed light on the freedom people had to choose between the contradictory normative systems that they encountered in life. By doing so, the dominance of well-known historical narratives was questioned.

The next phase in microhistory was introduced by historians like Matti Peltonen and Jacques Revel. They argued that marginal figures in history could be seen as representative of groups that have not been recognized before as a community. Elaborating upon the concept of 'thick description', as introduced by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Peltonen argued that the representativeness of the individual is dependent on the scale used to describe his agency.[4] The reduction of scale offers a new perspective on the larger context. As a politician or artist, someone experiences life differently than as a resident of a small village.

But biographical research can also work the other way around: by studying the individual perspective, something new can be said about general issues as well. The biographer then problematizes the way individuals are seen as representatives of a larger whole. This what we would call the third wave in microhistory. Modern biographers should not seek confirmation of the representativeness of the person under scrutiny. Instead, they are capable to show discrepancies in the agency of the individual between a micro- and a macrolevel.

When different roles are carried out in a life, people search for resemblances between their practices. This convergence leads to the formulation of new knowledge that governs the social setting in which the individual is playing

3 Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', in: Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives in Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 98–99.

4 Matti Peltonen, 'What is micro in microhistory?', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 109.

his role.[5] This knowledge cannot be singled out as being 'local' or 'minor', as Magnússon argues. He is willing to reject all contextualization in history books, because it blurs the lines between the individual past and the story we want to tell about that past.[6] This methodological rigorousness could lead to a neglect of the ability of the historian to offer a corrective to the dominant view of history with help of the individual perspective.[7]

The microhistorical approach is for the most part epistemological, providing instructions on how to gain new information in order to create new information or hypotheses. When the scale of observation is reduced, structures can be found that are relevant on a larger scale than the individual life. It then appears that theoretical frameworks that are imposed on historical phenomena from the top down are not always able to describe the individual agency. By looking only for normal exceptions, the process of (not) adapting to norms, roles or expectations in life can easily be flattened out in larger generalizations.[8]

In a biographical research that takes microhistory as its method, the sources do not speak for themselves. They have to be diligently contextualized, in order to show that these voices are coming to us in an institutionalized manner. Microhistory then becomes a hermeneutical device, allowing us to interpret historical sources in a new way. To scale down the historical event to a human dimension allows the historian to test the experience of an individual to the grand historical narrative.

In a functionalist historiography, one seeks to normalize certain social behavior within a coherent system, which is used as an explanation of the way the system functions. Instead, microhistory starts off with the contradictions that govern social behavior. The fragmentary, contradictory perspectives that normative systems impose on social behavior are thus fully appreciated. It is no longer the aim of microhistory to define the function of the formal institutions in power, as Magnússon argues.[9] This functionality was indeed at the

5 Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description. Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 25.

6 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, 'Far-reaching Microhistory: the use of microhistorical perspective in a globalized world', in: *Rethinking History* 21(2017)3, p. 2.

7 Nigel Hamilton, 'Biography as corrective', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 15–30.

8 Hans Renders, 'Exceptions that Prove the Rule. Biography, Microhistory and Marginals in Dutch Cities', p. 74.

9 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory. A Life Story of a Destitute Pauper Poet in the 19th Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 28.

Marxist roots of Italian microhistory, but fifty years later, the focus has shifted to the representativity of individual agency in describing larger contexts. Agency can yield power relations, but it is also capable of acknowledging the status quo.

Microhistory needs a specific form of communication with the reader: the narrative. This form allows the biographer to show the relationship between normative systems and the openness to allow for individual actions taking place within the margins of these systems. If you want to tell why a historical phenomenon was important at a certain moment in history, it is not sufficient to present your research in case studies. A historical investigation based upon case studies is at risk of wanting to meet a certain horizon of expectations. By using microhistory as an open, truly critical method of investigation, the historian shows that the course of life is like a narrative, that is: fundamentally undecided.

The Devil Is in the Detail: What Is a 'Great Historical Question'?

Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon

What is Microhistory? – that is the key question asked in this debate article. Routledge published a book by Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, in which they dealt with the same question, but from very different points of view. This emerged clearly in the book; indeed their differences are an integral part of the book's structure. This contribution addresses what István Szijártó sees as the principal characteristics of microhistory, focusing mainly on the factor he terms a 'great historical question', as well as other developments in the microhistorical camp for the last decade or so. The plan is also to address some of the concerns that Hans Renders and David Veltman have about microhistory in this debate forum. Here it is argued that it is primarily the handling of the subject itself, the unit under study, which lends significance to the research and makes it microhistory. That is an important statement for those who do biographical research, to gain confirmation that their subject matter is the main focus point. Anything else is simply academic contextualization, contingent upon trends in scholarly circles, and generally governed by 'the grand narrative'. That includes issues that might be labeled 'great historical questions'. Furthermore, the author of this contribution discusses his own views on the phenomenon of microhistory. Although those views are theoretical in nature, they are meant to be a model for those interested in applying the methods of microhistory in their research. In short, this article is a part of an underlying debate between scholars about microhistory and historical writing in general.

1 Debates about Microhistory – How Did It All Start?

We, the authors of the book *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, which was published in May 2013 by Routledge, have been in formal contact since 2006. Although we have both been interested in developing the methods of microhistory, the emphasis of our work has differed. This emerged clearly in the above-mentioned volume; indeed our differences are an integral part of the book's structure. As István M. Szijártó pointed out in the introduction to our book, we did 'not intend to smooth over the differences of our ideas about

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_017

microhistory, for there is evidently an underlying debate going on between the two of us, which would be silly to hide or deny'.[1] For that reason, our book has in fact at least two different voices that vie for the approval of the prospective reader.

And during the preparation of the book, the differences between us emerged even more clearly than before. Our approach was that each wrote his own part of the book; they were then exchanged when they were completed. That meant that we influenced only the original form of the book proposal, which was peer-reviewed by four different scholars. Not until all the chapters had been completed, however, did the real magnitude of our disagreement become clear to me.

As stated above, our approach was to criticize each other as forcefully as we felt able. We did this, of course, in a manner appropriate for friends, honestly, and guided by our desire to make our book as interesting as possible; and to seek a felicitous solution to problems that come up in debating the methods of microhistory. This approach gave rise to an abundance of material, which we felt it was important to discuss further – as only some of it was included in the published book.

I shall briefly discuss here what István Szijártó sees as the principal characteristics of microhistory, focusing mainly on the factor he terms 'the great historical question.' Also, I shall discuss my own views on the phenomenon of microhistory – although those views are, of course, primarily to be found in the book itself, *What is Microhistory?* At the same time I will bring into the discussions other scholars and their arguments about the methods of microhistory, with the intention of drawing out the many faces of the microhistorical approach, including the important contributions of both Hans Renders and David Veltman to this debate.

2 How to Define the Concept of Microhistory?

István Szijártó brings out three factors which he sees as typifying microhistory, and searches for them in his discussion of the many works he chooses to address in our book. The common factors of these writings are that they are either deemed to belong to the microhistorical genre, and that they are studies that he thinks deserve to be considered part of it, or those he judges not to meet the criteria. The factors which determine, in Szijártó's judgment,

1 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, 9.

whether a study may be categorized as a good microhistorical work, are the following:

a) the reduction of the scale of observation,
b) 'a great historical question',
c) agency.

These factors are, of course based upon certain fundamental principles upheld by the vast majority of microhistorians, which may be briefly defined as an 'analysis, at extremely close range, of highly circumscribed phenomena – a village community, a group of families, even an individual person,' as Ginzburg and Poni put it in their important study.[2] They, like the vast majority of microhistorians, go on to emphasize contextualization; to connect their microhistorical research units with a larger whole.

In addition to this, Szijártó places his discussion of individual works of microhistory within a framework formed of geographical and developmental factors. Hence the evolution of microhistory in Italy is specifically discussed, as is French microhistory, and the German. Historiographical development in the English-speaking world is a special subject of discussion, and also certain areas on the periphery, such as Scandinavia, Hungary and Russia.

These divisions are in many ways reasonable, as our book was intended *inter alia* to be historiographical in nature. And we discussed this matter exhaustively when we were working on the structure of the book and how best to organize it with the objective of bringing out the character of the microhistorical approach. Szijártó's geographical approach demands a discussion of historical works which predate the methods of microhistory. It becomes necessary to explore leading works which are deemed to have laid the foundation for this school of history, in order to show historiographical development in the right context. For this reason Szijártó digs up works of history which appear to have little or nothing in common with the microhistorical approach. It is, to say the least, an unusual approach to discuss works such as those of John Demos (*Entertaining Satan*, 1982), Paul Boyer and Stephan Nissenbaum (*Salem Possessed*, 1974), and Alan Macfarlane (*The Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, 1977) as examples of microhistory – despite the fact that they lack some of the qualities regarded by István Szijártó as necessary for a work to be classified as 'pure' microhistorical work.[3] In his part of the book he even devotes discussion to

2 Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, 'Il nome et il come: Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico', trans. E. Branch (first published 1979), 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace', in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 1–5.

3 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, 46–48. See also: John P. Demos, *Entertaining Satan. Witchcraft and the culture of early New England* (Oxford:

George R. Stewart's *Pickett's Charge* of 1959 with respect to the methods of microhistory, 'decades before the birth of *microstoria*,' as he puts it.[4] All these writings belong to the school of social and/or cultural history; they were produced within that tradition, and in the context of the debate that took place there on methods and approaches in research. These works have, essentially, nothing to do with microhistory, and I doubt whether the authors had any knowledge of that school; and indeed it was little known, if at all, when most of these books were published.

István Szijártó gets away with discussing these works as described above, because throughout his part of the book he strives to find commonalities between historical studies of which he approves and the factors he assumes to typify microhistory. As a result, a dynamic analysis of the whole phenomenon is lacking. And it is somewhat surprising when he makes in the book such assertions as: 'Anglo-Saxon historiography usually defines microhistory very loosely,' without any further explanation.[5] Many outstanding works of history that may be classified as microhistory are by American historians, but relatively few of them are concerned with American reality and history.[6] Such works, which have some of the features of microhistory generally, spring from quite different roots in historical research. So, we can pause here and consider the reasons why 'historiographical analysis' is used as a basis for historical analysis in general. What this means in practice is an exploration of a specific topic, and how historians have explained events, concepts or people over time. The focus has traditionally been on how their explanations have changed throughout history due to current worldviews and/or ideological fads. Some-

---

Oxford University Press, 1982); Paul Boyer and Stephan Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed. The social origins of witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin. A seventeenth-century clergyman. An essay in historical anthropology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970).

4 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, 51. See George R. Stewart, *Pickett's Charge. A microhistory of the final attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).

5 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 50.

6 See good examples from USA, that might be labeled as microhistory, on American history: Joseph A. Amato, *Jacob's Well. A case for rethinking family history* (St. Paul, MN: The Minnesota Historical Society, 2008); Donna Merwick, *Death of a Notary: Conquest and change in colonial New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Irene Quenzler Brown and Richard D. Brown, *The Hanging of Ephraim Wheeler. A story of rape, incest and justice in early America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett. The life and death of a prostitute in nineteenth-century New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

times the sources are the main subject matter, so the historiographical analysis is through re-interpretation of previously-viewed sources. Hence this often takes place with the availability of new sources, previously unexplored, and of course, due to the application of different questions or methodologies to the source material. Revision of prior interpretations of the past is an implicit and important element of historiography, as it has been developed over the past two hundred years or so.

A factor, which is important to bear in mind, is the influence of individual cultural areas on the general international development of historiographical analysis. It can be vital to a full understanding of the phenomenon in question to be aware of the influence of the culture, language and history of individual regions on the development of the phenomenon. In such cases it is important to explore links between regions (countries) and the external influences that have affected them – to slacken the rigid categories that historians are so prone to work with, and ensure that the influences may be seen from as many angles as possible.[7]

The best approach, in my view, is to analyze the character of individual studies – regardless of the nationality of the historian – which may be classified as microhistorical: how the writer backs up his/her discussion and analysis, and where he/she has found models for the approach. Thus we may say that microhistorical analysis can be based upon the phenomenon itself: applying microhistorical methods to analyse the phenomenon of microhistory itself – as Carlo Ginzburg did with such spectacular success in his important paper 'Microhistory: One or two things I know about it,' published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1993.[8] In this way the reader gradually gains an idea of what the characteristics of microhistory are, and how they work, as a rule, when applied by historians who can be classified as microhistorians.

Szijártó's approach is different. He lists the factors he sees as typifying good microhistorical research, and seeks them in specific works of history. If he finds only two of the three factors in the work, he judges that the study cannot be discussed in the category of microhistorical works. 'There is no reason to

7 Only a few reference works will be mentioned here. See for example the following studies: Miguel A. Cabrera, *Postsocial History. An Introduction*, transl. Marie McMahon (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004); Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 2006, 2nd edition); Keith Jenkins, *Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003, 3rd edition); Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the 20th Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (New York: Wesleyan, 2005).

8 Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or three things that I know about it,' *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993), p. 10–35.

think that the method of micro-analysis was taught to French historians by Italian microhistorians', says Szijártó when preparing to discuss George Duby's 1973 work *The Legend of Bouvines*, a book which he calls 'an early example' of microhistory.[9] He finishes his discussion of the content of the book by concluding: 'But Duby's micro-analysis is not fully-fledged microhistory. It is not the deep analysis of the battle, in which Philip Augustus, King of France won a great victory …'.[10] And then he adds: 'Neither does it serve as a point of entry into an alien culture. The author does not build on it a general thesis, nor the refutation of another.' Here, in other words, the author has opted to expel this work from the company of 'pure' microhistory, instead of examining the factors which truly owe something to the tradition that characterizes the methods of microhistory, and considering the influence that works of this kind have had on the evolution of the phenomenon, anywhere in the world. Szijártó's approach means that he misses the opportunity to delve into the often complex and convoluted evolution of microhistory in different parts of the world.

3 Contextualization – Micro-/biographical Approach

I fear that many microhistorians will agree with Szijártó's arguments regarding the context of large and small units of study. We have countless examples of microhistorians having a tendency to place their units of study into a broader context, connecting it with cultural entities. I shall take one example, which is in fact well known, to illustrate the approach discussed by Szijártó. And what is more, it is a good example of the relationship between microhistory and biographical studies.

Aristocrats by Stella Tillyard is a group biography of four upper-class sisters who lived in the United Kingdom in the 18th and 19th centuries. The sisters – Caroline (1723–1774), Emily (1731–1814), Louisa (1743–1821) and Sarah Lennox (1745–1826) – were the daughters of Charles Lennox, second Duke of Richmond.[11] Charles was a grandson of King Charles II; his father was the king's illegitimate son by his French mistress, Louise de Kéroualle. Charles Lennox and his wife Sarah had seven children who lived to adulthood; the youngest

9 George Duby, *Le dimanche de Bouvines* (1973); trans. C. Tihanyi, *The Legend of Bouvines* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

10 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 28.

11 Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah Lennox, 1740–1832* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994).

of the sisters, Cecilia (1750–1769), died at the age of only 19, unmarried and without issue. In addition to the five daughters, Charles and Sarah had two sons: Charles, third Duke of Richmond (1735–1806), and George (1737–1805). The book recounts the interesting lives of the four sisters, focusing on how their lives were connected and interrelated. The work is based mostly on the sisters' correspondence among themselves and with other family members and friends. The book thus presents a very personal approach to the sisters' lives, as their letters are full of writing expressing their feelings about each other, other members of the family, and various events that took place around them, both personal and political.

Their father, husbands, sons and brothers were generally men in positions of influence in society, and thus the sisters lived their lives in the world of politics and in the social environment of the British upper class. In the book we learn a lot about that environment, from the sisters' perspective as manifested in the letters, but primarily through Tillyard's general discussion of social events that touched their lives. And it is here that Tillyard succumbs to the temptation to connect her subject – which is crammed with interesting events relating to the sisters' lives – to larger-scale entities. Most noticeable is the discussion of British warfare, ideological movements on the role and status of the upper class, and extensive discussion of Irish-British relations, crystallized in narratives of the Irish rebellion of 1798. Emily, admittedly, married an Irish aristocrat in 1746, and at the death of the sisters' parents in 1750–51 the three younger sisters were placed in Emily's care, while Caroline remained in London with her husband.

The context of the story is not only told in light of important events, as the book also includes various narratives of daily life in the 18th century – notably a description of everyday life in London: the reader joins the early risers, then moves around the city as it comes to life in the course of the day.[12] With this account Tillyard seeks to bring out certain class differences between the sisters and the common people, placing their life in a 'broader context.' It is an interesting perspective *per se*, but here she loses the focus on her own subject. It must be borne in mind that the sources – the letters – are colored by the fact that the sisters made a record of their own lives in a most artistic way, inspired by extensive reading of novels and reflections on epistolary art. Through the letters they became the narrators of their own lives, 'magnificent heroines of their own story.'[13]

12 Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats*, p. 152–163.

13 Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats*, p. xxvii.

It is particularly interesting about this work that it makes an attempt to examine groups who had previously been sidelined in historical writing; and through egodocuments created by the group the prospect was opened up of a meaningful analysis of their lives and activities. Using this approach and other similar ones, the scholarly biography evolved. The group biography, in fact, marked a departure from traditional biography, whose subject was the life story of powerful males and their rise to distinction. Here the focus shifts from the individual as the unity of study to the relationships and bonds among a number of individuals at the same time – assuredly a subject which was a good fit for the methods of microhistory.

Aristocrats is not only an example of a group biography; the protagonists are also women. The group biography has been seen as a useful form for writing women's history, precisely because they have often been omitted from history, and sources created by them have been ignored because they stood outside the traditional power structure. The problem with this book is, however, that the author has not had sufficient confidence in her sources being able to sustain the entire narrative of a whole book; to delve into them with the zeal they invite, in order to bring out the multifarious symbols and meanings that belong to their lives. Hence she falls into the pit of asking a 'great historical question' relating to the male world of the time, missing the opportunity to examine the lives of the sisters in their own environment.[14]

Renders and Veltman, in their contribution to the debate in this book, consider the position of works such as the one discussed above: whether such a history – or a comparable one – can really stand for a bigger entity, and whether in general microhistory can shed light on bigger entities. The question of representation is, assuredly, a classic subject in discussion of the value of the microhistorical method. They point out *inter alia* that clues and meanings in each individual case are something that microhistorians work with in order to try to discover some 'sign of a larger, but hidden or unknown, structure. A strange detail is made to represent a wider totality.' In their discussion

14 I should state here that I have chosen this work almost at random. The feature discussed here, of linking the subject to larger entities, typifies almost all microhistorical studies known to me. To name a few examples: Douglas Smith, *The Pearl. A True Tale of Forbidden Love in Catherine the Great's Russia* (Yale University Press, 2008); Nicholas Terpastra, *Lost Girls. Sex and Death in Renaissance Florence* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Júnia Ferreira Furtado, *Chica Da Silva. A Brazilian Slave of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jay M. Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan. The Making of a Beast* (Harvard University Press, 2011); David L. Ransel, *A Russian Merchant's Tale. The Life and Adventures of Ivan Alekseevich Tolchënov, Based on His Diary* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

they consider some historiographical steps within the development of microhistory, the first being the Italian school of microhistory: here each individual was seen as being in a constant process of negotiation with the formal structure of the society. Hence it was important to identify that dialogue, in order to grasp how popular culture worked. The second step was taken by a group of microhistorians who argued 'that marginal figures in history could be seen as representative of groups that have not been recognized before as a community'. By reducing the scale of observation one could identify these groups of people and their contribution to the development of the society at large. And the same is true of biographical studies, the authors say: 'by studying the individual perspective, something new can be said about general issues as well', as Renders and Veltman argue. They make an attempt to convince us that this way of dealing with historical problems could be called the third wave of microhistory, whereas I believe it is, in fact, in excellent harmony with the second step described above.

Renders and Veltman maintain that when people play different roles in life, they seek out liking their way of living with other groups in society. This quest for a role leads to the formation of new knowledge, which defines the social environment in which the individual plays their role. There is certainly truth in the idea that individuals seek meaning in their immediate surroundings, and it is for that reason that I place the primary emphasis on keeping to the historian's research unit. As soon as we seek a comparable course of life to assess the representativeness of the individual agency, we are making comparisons that have less to do with the discipline of history than that of psychology. This is primarily where we differ. The fact is that by having the opportunity to examine the individual in their immediate environment we also gain the opportunity to analyze how that same environment responded to unexpected events experienced by people during their lives. Thus we gain an opportunity to examine how society really works. And precisely for this reason microhistory and biographical study can benefit from each other's approach. By studying each individual life, one is likely to draw out important elements of the function of the society – not in the broad context, but within the environment in which the person lived and acted.

4 How Can a 'Great Historical Question' Be Identified in a Historical Analysis?

The 'Singularization of History' argument, which I have been developing in recent years, is in sharp contrast with what most historians would acknow-

ledge as a suitable conceptual framework in historical scholarship. One can argue that it is sign of a new wave in microhistory, but its importance will transpire in due course. Unequivocally, almost all Italian microhistorians, and in fact most microhistorians worldwide, would still uphold the importance of contextualization – placing the small unit of study in a broader context – *inter alia* as a response to criticisms of the narrow perspective of their studies. Without this, microhistorical studies are deemed to have little meaning; they are dismissed as insignificant by comparison with 'real' (empirical) scholarship.

This microhistorical approach exists in many variants. Some microhistorians are more determined than others in contextualizing their studies, although most see it as one of the principal qualities of this historical approach.[15] Few, if any, however, have completely rejected the idea that it may be desirable not to contextualize, as is my approach in the 'singularization of history' model. And by applying the 'textual environment' research model in my work, I may go even further than I originally intended by examining each source in the greatest possible detail – exploring their composition and examining them with the greatest possible accuracy, with the aim of gaining an understanding of the story they tell, and how they can be used to understand the past.[16]

That approach has led me to such diverse subjects of research as material culture and the history of emotions – and in my latest research project I seek to counterpose these two phenomena in the context of the everyday life experience of the general public. Both offer an opportunity for an interesting application of the research models I have been developing – the singularization of history and the textual environment – where I seek to direct the focus onto the subject *per se*. The material culture is not simply an accumulation comprising the total – 'all' material surrounding our life: in truth each individual object has its own story and meaning, which is susceptible to analysis.

---

15 I will mention a few, but good, exceptions from this rule, where historians make an attempt to stick with their case and put contextualization more or less in the back seat. See: Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Nina Rattner Gelbart, *The King's Midwife: A history and mystery of Madame du Coudray* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder: the Victorian serial killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Burry Reay, *Watching Hannah. Sexuality, horror and bodily de-formation in Victorian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).

16 See a recent attempt to follow a similar research model in Már Jónsson, *Arnas Magnæus Philologus (1663–1730)*. Viking Collection 20 (Odense: University of Southern Denmark, 2012).

The same is true of the role of emotions in human life: material relating to them, such as egodocuments, provides the opportunity to delve deep into the human psyche to throw light on specific aspects of human existence.[17] In my research I have placed great emphasis on minimizing all contextualization vis-à-vis the environment – limiting it to the immediate environment of the subject.[18] As soon as a historian loses sight of local knowledge, whatever the form in which it is manifested, they will start to rely upon something else, unrelated to the subject: we may call this the structural formation of the official discourse of the historical discipline.[19]

István M. Szijártó gives prominence, in his evaluation of individual works of history in our book, to the issue of whether the writings ask what he calls 'great historical questions'. If the authors of the books he considers do *not* do so, he deems them not to belong to the category of microhistorical research. He even goes so far as to apply to such works a concept, which Robert Darnton has called 'incident analysis', applying it to all works which to a greater or lesser extent are self-referential, without relation to their environment.

5 All Things Considered

I want to address the 'condition' which Szijártó applies to every work which is to be classified as microhistory, in five points. Again, I would like to point out that our arguments are friendly, though fundamental:

17 See international discussions on the history of emotions in, for example: Jan Plamper, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,' in: *History and Theory*, 49 (May 2010), p. 237–265; Barbara H. Rosenwein, '*Review Essay*: Worrying about Emotions in History,' *American Historical Review*, 107 (June 2002), p. 821–845; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

18 See for example: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory. A Life Story of a Destitute Pauper Poet in the 19th Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

19 The importance of the local knowledge is discussed at great length in the following articles: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, 'Minor Knowledge: Microhistory, Scribal Communities, and the Importance of Institutional Structures,' in: *Quaderni storici* 47(2012)140, p. 495–524; and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, 'Barefoot Historians: Education in Iceland in the Modern Period,' in *Writing Peasants. Studies on Peasant Literacy in Early Modern Northern Europe*, ed. Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt and Bjørn Poulsen. Århus: Landbohistorisk Selskab, 2002, 175–209. These arguments are further developed in the following book: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Manuscript Culture in the Long 19th Century* (London, Routledge, 2017).

A. What is a 'great historical question'? This simple question exposes the problem entailed by Szijártó's approach: I cannot see that the question can be answered in any absolute manner. One may easily maintain that all subjects – large and small – grapple with some 'great historical question,' whether consciously or unconsciously. The 'smallness' of a question, in the mind of some specific historian, could in fact be regarded as a 'great historical question' in itself, as addressed by another. The truth is that the story of one minute in the life of some unknown person has little significance in itself, if it is bound to some 'great historical question'.

B. Even if it were possible to give a clear answer to the question posed above – What is a 'great historical question'? – we would still have to determine whether a question of that nature may be informed by the culture, customs and practices of specific regions. Not to mention the concept of time, which naturally influences all our comprehension of historical phenomena. And if so, what is the value of this specific viewpoint, especially when it is used as a yardstick regardless of circumstances or time, as Szijártó does? Is this not in direct contradiction to one of the principles of microhistorical analysis as practiced by historians all around the world, termed 'the normal exception'?

C. The question may be asked: is not this requirement that authors ask 'great historical questions' precisely in the spirit of orthodox or traditional history, which was based upon the ideology that only the 'great,' the 'magnificent,' was worthy of study? Guided by such ideas, history traditionally focused on approximately 2% of humanity: middle-aged white males in positions of power! Social/cultural history as it evolved in the latter half of the 20th century aimed specifically at changing that view of history. When that attempt failed,[20] historians stepped forward under the banner of microhistory, to focus precisely on matters which had previously been deemed insignificant – what my colleague Davíð Ólafsson and I have termed 'minor knowledge' (in an ironic tone).[21] The reason for this was that these historians saw in the fragments a hidden avenue for exploration, which had hitherto been overlooked by social and cultural historians.

The majority of microhistorians appear to be on their guard against the domination of the 'grand narrative' in historical research, and some strive system-

20 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, '*The Singularization of History*', p. 701–735.

21 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, 'Minor Knowledge: Microhistory, Scribal Communities, and the Importance of Institutional Structures,' 495–524. See also: Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory*.

atically to evade its deterministic nature. It is hardly possible to imagine any way to circumvent the 'grand narrative' if we accede to Szijártó's demand that every study should ask a 'great historical question'. If we follow his example, it is hard to see what the point of microhistory can be.

Works which fail to ask 'great historical questions' are cast by Szijártó into the outer darkness, consigned to a category he calls 'incident analysis,' a term he has borrowed from US historian Robert Darnton.[22] Szijártó explains his view thus: 'Anglo-Saxon microhistory … focuses more and more on the case: investigating it for itself, for its own interest and for the sake of the people involved – but no longer with the ambition of learning about 'great historical questions'. It seems, therefore, more and more justified to call these works 'incident analyses".[23] His discussion is colored by the inference that works of this nature are not deserving of respect. And he explains the phenomenon further, extending it to 'books that share the intensive micro-investigation with microhistory, but do not want to make statements on a general, macro-level'.[24] In my view the two phenomena – 'great historical questions' and 'incident analyses' – share the common factor that it is not easy to grasp their beginning or end – to discern clear limits which are useful in historical research.

This notion of a 'great historical question' is fallacious, from any perspective. In my opinion it must be judged anti-microhistorical (if that phrase is permissible): I feel that this approach fails to grasp the point of microhistory, and does not illuminate in any way the importance of that methodology, nor display its strengths. It does, however, highlight the problem faced by many microhistorians around the globe: how to apply the methods of microhistory in such a way as to be truly useful in historical analysis.

6 How to Approach Microhistory?

In the relationship between a particular source document (a written representation of the past) and historical context (a comprehensive mental representation of the given problem or age), the latter is dominant. But in order to have such a contextual knowledge, historians need the previous experience which has confronted them with hundreds of individual source documents. Therefore, while a detailed document is needed for a micro-investigation, not

22 Robert Darnton wrote about the concept in: 'It happened one night', *New York Review of Books*, 51 (no. 11, 24 June 2004), p. 60–64.

23 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 53.

24 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 8.

even the richest sources make microhistory in themselves. At best, they might result in an 'incident analysis'. In order for microhistory to furnish the answer to a 'great historical question', a microhistorian with comprehensive contextual knowledge is also necessary.[25] This is essentially the crux of Szijártó's argument about microhistory: that microhistory is worthless unless the study is placed in the context of the big picture, and in order to thrive it needs to be backed up by the historian's preconceived knowledge.

At the beginning of the final chapter of *What is Microhistory?* I enumerate ten factors which may be applied to answering the above question – posed in the chapter heading. These are factors: '… which are generally recognized as being indispensable on the agenda of this type of history … (1) the role of narrative; (2) synthesis in history; (3) history and fiction; (4) historical subjectivity; (5) normal exceptions; (6) the reduction of the scale of observation; (7) the individual and the past; (8) ethnological and anthropological methodology; (9) microhistory and relativism; (10) contextualization'.[26]

For each specific study which may be classified as microhistory, each one of these items is not necessarily of equal importance; but we may say that all the factors are considered, in one form or another, by historians who are classified as microhistorians. They will reach some conclusion about similar phenomena at some point in the research process: it would be almost unavoidable to do anything else. This fact makes microhistory into the scholarly force that I believe it is. The method requires the researcher to place their work in a specific scholarly context, the form of which is variable according to the circumstances.

If we do not eschew 'great historical questions' (though that is not my form of words), there will be a risk that our research questions will be predetermined, as will the findings of the research. This does not entail, however, that the microhistorian must 'disinfect' him/herself from all outside influences; only that he/she should curb these as far as possible – keep them within the bounds of the frame of reference of the study. If the subject is an individual, in a certain village at a certain time, it will be necessary to examine, not only the individual him/herself, but also the immediate environment which has nurtured him/her. As soon as the researcher is burdened with the requirement to ask 'great historical questions' – which generally means that the subject must be viewed outside the framework of his/her immediate environment – there is a tendency to lose sight of what actually matters – the research unit itself.

25 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 65.
26 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 147.

Other factors – beyond control – start to define the boundaries of the study. We see this in *Aristocrats*: the focus went from the sisters to the society at large, and at the same time the study lost the opportunity to shed light the intense relationship between the four women.

I have urged microhistorians to turn their focus inwards, and to explore in as much detail as possible all data relating to their subject. Such an approach, I believe, offers microhistorians an opportunity to seek out new knowledge and unknown phenomena in human life, and throw an unexpected light upon them. When microhistorians – in Europe or America – have the courage of their convictions, to stand by their micro-approach, new opportunities open up for analysis – as has been shown and proven in the work of many microhistorians all over the world.

We may say, perhaps, that Szijártó's perspective is understandable, as he works on the basis of the concept of 'fractals,' which he explains as systems within any given structure. When they are analyzed with more and more precision '… each of these is similar to the original structure,' Szijártó argues. He claims that it is a 'pattern inside pattern' which can be found in human societies.[27] He asks whether this ideology can be applied to history: his answer is that of course it is possible to study some isolated historic continuum, but that with increasing numbers of variables the subject will become infinitely complex. In his view, the historian must have an overview in order to be able to delve into his subject, especially if applying the methods of microhistory. In this context he cites the example of a Hungarian historian, Lajos Für. Szijártó concludes that Für has succeeded in doing interesting microhistorical research due to his existing knowledge of agriculture and rural society in 18th-century Hungary: 'Studying archival sources, he came across the incident at Bercel and recognized an overall pattern in that single case'. And he explains his idea further: according to Szijártó, 'self-similarity does not exist between reality on one hand and a book on the other, but between two representations, two discursive entities, which exist in the historian's mind only. In this approach the factual-like nature of microhistory is not chance or unbelievable coincidence, but reasonable necessity.'[28]

In the end, if we consider the works of microhistorians over the past three decades, it is obvious that their value lies in the unit, which they have researched in detail, in the most successful cases. The demand for contextualization has, on the other hand, in my view diminished the impact of many

27 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 63.
28 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 64.

studies of this nature. Microhistorians have themselves undermined the value of their own research, by forcing their study to fit a bigger context. For this reason, microhistorical research has had little influence on the mainstream approach to history in recent decades. Contrary to Szijártó's view, I believe that historians will be more successful if they strive to clear their minds of outside influences concerning the grand narratives – as thoroughly as they are able. This can never be achieved completely; but it is possible to resist their influence, using a range of methods. For these reasons, Szijártó and I disagree, both on how microhistory is made, and what its significance can be in the scholarly world. In fact, microhistorians lose their focus on the subject matter, if they do not take care to steer clear of the great historical questions! The answers to microhistorical questions are now to be found – as always – in the details.

Arguments for Microhistory 2.0

István M. Szijártó

We capitalize on our differences concerning the nature of microhistory. As far as I see, Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon employs a normative approach, telling what microhistory should be like. While he is decidedly against contextualization, generalization and meta-narratives, it can be argued that his use of the term 'meta-narrative' is too loose, in his text he sometimes endorses generalizations and admits the necessity of contextualization. This essay argues for possible paths of doing microhistory. First, for a cooperation of macro and microhistories in which the macro-argument of the books is backed up by several microhistories which convey lived experience to the readers, and then, for a microhistory that shapes national history.[1]

The present work and Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon's parallel text might be regarded as an extended epilogue to our book *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, a Janus-faced book. Not mainly because its two parts have been written by two different historians, but rather because Parts I and II differ significantly in their take on microhistory. We have different approaches; Part I is descriptive, mapping microhistory with its borderlands and Part II is rather normative, describing what microhistory should be like. We also have different views on microhistory: while in Part I, I try to argue for a microhistory which is based on a micro-analysis, which strives for answering a 'great historical question', and focuses on agency, Magnússon advocates the 'singularization of history', which rejects generalizations and suggests that the method of the 'textual environment' should be used.

As history is a scholarly discourse, our disagreement is not only a display of the difference in positions but also an opportunity opening up possibilities. Thus, following some critical remarks directly made on Magnússon's half of our common book, the argument of this article will be directed towards sketching up an option for microhistory in which it is playing the part of a junior partner to macro-oriented history. Finally, a suggestion will be made how microhistory can make a further step forward, towards – let us put it like this – Microhistory 2.0, which aspires to inform and form macrohistory, even its most traditional genre, national history.

1 I would like to thank Tünde Cserpes and Zoltán Boldizsár Simon for their comments on an earlier version of this text.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_018

1 Micro-criticism of Magnússon's Microhistory

A number of minor points can be raised against a few statements, written by my colleague, and here some of those will be mentioned which concern the interpretation of Natalie Zemon Davis's classic *The Return of Martin Guerre*, a famous book on a sixteenth-century case.[2] A young Basque peasant, Martin Guerre, had left his family, and a couple of years later another young man, Pansette took his place in the family and the village. When his identity was questioned in court, witnesses were divided, but the clever Pansette could convince the referee judge of the Parlement of Toulouse, Jean de Coras of his assumed identity. He almost won the case when the real Martin appeared in Toulouse. Pansette was deserted by all his witnesses, lost the case and was executed.

Magnússon believes that the 'method applied in microhistory is termed the 'evidential paradigm". Microhistorians, when following this 'method', for example, should possess 'great attention to detail'.[3] This special care for the detail might not, however, have always been displayed by him when reading *The Return of Martin Guerre*. In contrary to Magnússon's account, I have not, for example, read Davis asserting in her book that Martin's uncle, Pierre Guerre had sued his alleged nephew before the court case was filed about his identity in Rieux by Pierre in the name of Bertrande. It was, in fact, a local squire who sued Martin for arson.[4] Nor does Davis write that Bertrande 'testified against her putative husband during the trials'. She did not do so and, as a matter of fact, even her behavior in court not identifying him as her real husband is hard enough to reconcile with the statement that Bertrande has 'never abandoned him'. Davis herself does not claim that the story 'has survived in

2 Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

3 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 107, 149. Are there, actually, any works of microhistory that have been written following this 'method'? Moreover, is not Ginzburg's article in question rather a bold experiment aimed at outlining an epistemology of history in general? (Cf. Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in: Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, transl. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). It also seems to me that in Ginzburg's theory it is the illness (or the murder) that is 'hidden', and not the symptoms (or 'clues') through which they can be revealed to the doctor (or the detective). (Cf. Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 107). It is this way that their attitude can serve as a model for the historian, who also tries to decipher the directly untouchable (hidden) past through the traces (clues) accessible in the present.

4 Davis, *The Return*, p. 57, cf. Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 104.

French folk tradition over the centuries, into our own times, [...] acquiring the status of a folk legend in France, passed down from person to person' and that 'such folk traditions were used by' her. In fact, Davis only writes that this story became famous in France because 'over the centuries it was retold in books on famous impostors and *causes célèbres* and is still remembered in the Pyrenean village of Artigat where the events took place four hundred years ago.'[5]

Every book contains errors of different kinds, and I have no doubt that an attentive reader could find many more in Part I, written by myself, than those enumerated here. It is still symptomatic that Magnússon preferred not to change his original text even when these minor points of inaccuracy had been brought to his attention. His insistence on his original concept signifies an attitude that hides behind his normative stance that characterizes his approach to microhistory.

2 What Should Microhistory Look Like?

I myself know very well that Magnússon does not want to tailor all microhistory to fit his own broad shoulders. He acknowledges achievements resulting from all kinds of microhistorical research. Still, his chapters often fail to convey this sentiment, for they are packed with normative statements which seem to prescribe what microhistory should be like. He often speaks about 'the ideology of microhistory', and he states, for example, that 'the microhistorian is not interested in how the mass of the population lived their lives, only in how the subject of study managed his/her affairs', or claims that 'microhistorians approach this research material differently: they specifically search out the outliers'. Magnússon's text sometimes does not seem to offer much room for alternatives.[6]

Magnússon stresses that his ideal of microhistory, based on the 'singularization of history', does not furnish a theory for existing microhistory, as 'the vast majority of microhistorians [...] never lost sight of broader historical and polit-

5 Davis, *The Return*, p. vii, cf. Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 105, 108. In the light of the fact that Jean de Coras and one of his colleagues conducted ten or twelve sessions questioning the two to find out which of them was the real Martin Guerre, it seems somewhat misleading to state that Pansette was 'unceremoniously found guilty' on Martin's arrival. (p. 105; cf. Davis, *The Return*, p. 84).

6 For example he claims that the microhistorian is only interested in individuals, their motivation, their lives. (Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 107.)

ical contexts', that is they take paths other than the one suggested by himself.[7] To learn what microhistory should be like, the reader therefore is not provided with a summary of microhistorical research undertaken by several authors, but the life story of the late nineteenth – early twentieth-century Icelandic brothers, Níels and Halldór, on the one hand and Magnússon's own love story on the other. It is from these that the readers should get an understanding of the nature of microhistory, the essence of which seems to be this: looking inward, studying 'all aspects in close detail', 'bringing out the nuances', focusing 'on the matter in hand', and employing every directly relevant means of interpretation. This microhistory is rejecting completeness as a goal, embraces 'contradictions and inconsistencies in the mind of each and every individual'. The 'singularization of history' would thus enable the historian to get rid of metanarratives.[8]

For me these examples seem insufficient. Actually, I have felt a frustration not being able to find a single adequate illustration to what Magnússon suggests, what microhistory should be like according to him. Not that it would automatically prove his point, but it would at least give readers a better idea of what he is talking about. Having published a book about the brothers Níels and Halldór, who left an amazing amount of manuscript material, letters, diaries, even handwritten local newspapers produced by themselves, Magnússon received a letter from one of his readers stating that Níels, the author of beautiful love letters, castrated himself in a fit of anger as a result of a conflict with his jealous wife. Magnússon admits that this revelation proved him wrong: the method of the 'singularization of history' did not bring the expected insights, he proved unable to get to know his hero.[9] The only problem with this fact is that Halldór's and Níels's story was one of the two illustrations of the microhistory he is advocating. In the second, his West Side Story, the concept of the 'textual environment' comes to the fore: a stronger concentration on the sources should be the remedy of the failure in Níels's case, a special attention

7 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 121, 122. Later on, Magnússon writes not only about 'the vast majority of microhistorians' but about all of them: 'common to all microhistorians, however, is that they uphold the importance of contextualization,' an idea which he 'opposed' (p. 148).

8 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 122, 123.

9 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 123. Every historian has had an experience when a new source document rearranged the picture of his or her research, so there is no one who would blame Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon for his failure to grasp this dark side of Níels's character, and that of his relationship with his wife. It is, however, significant that he attributes this failure to the fact that he was 'taken up with writing the argument into the metanarrative' (p. 123–124).

paid to 'the interplay between the sources and the individuals to whom they relate'. Magnússon takes an episode of his own life 'to assess my own actions in a historical text and investigate how 'the narrative' has influenced my experience of 'what happened'.[10]

This story is very interesting, as, indeed, everything is, that is personal – to the benefit of most microhistory. Still, it is unclear how would an average historian sitting in a dusty archive instead of writing and living his own story should make use of the suggested analysis of 'the interlinking of events, narratives, analysis and new events'. The lesson that narratives are of crucial importance in understanding events, interpreting moments in someone's life is important but neither a novelty nor a specificity of microhistory. It is possible that the referred three books in Icelandic illustrate the method of 'textual environment' as a guide how to study ego-documents. Still, the reader of Part II of the book *What is microhistory?* is thus left without a single example illustrating what the microhistory that Magnússon advocates looks like.[11]

3 The Three Riders of the Apocalypse

Though it has been left somewhat unclear what kind of microhistory Magnússon is for, it is clear what he is against. His three arch enemies, contextualization, meta-narratives and generalization should be investigated one by one. Magnússon first argues against contextualization, incorporating microhistorians' 'research units within greater wholes', since this way 'the grand narrative monopolizes attention'.[12] But reading Part II, we may see contextualization in a more positive light, too. The author's suggested method, the 'textual environment' envisages 'to immerse onself in the wider context of the work,' and as for the sources, he is explicitly 'urging scholars [...] to consider their context'. Magnússon explicitly urges the microhistorian to 'examine each fragment of

10 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 141.

11 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 135, 141. Is this microhistory a 'minute analysis of events'? (p. 143.) A minute reconstruction of someone's life – does that automatically result in a microhistory? Is all biography microhistory? The final conclusion is advocating a close reading of sources that will give fresh insights. Is every historical work with such an approach automatically microhistory?

12 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 115, 158. He admits that the 'vast majority of microhistorians' see their research linked to the general level, as they test generalizations or intend to 'draw far wider generalizations', as he quotes Giovanni Levi (p. 121–122).

knowledge, and place it in the context of other knowledge possessed by the researcher'.[13]

Basically, Magnússon's attitude is determined by his hostility to 'meta-narratives' or 'grand narratives', opting for a 'singularization of history'. Micro-history has the most important asset for the author that it is a research approach which breaks free from all kinds of constraints, 'the shackles of the grand narrative'. Magnússon's problem with metanarratives is that they 'govern' the 'interpretation of the subject'. This is not only restrictive, he argues, but also unnecessary, because 'every individual subject contains such a big story, such a complex of connections, that there is no way to look beyond the framework of the study'.[14]

It can, however, be argued, that the term 'grand narratives' should rather be restricted to denote ideas like the liberal views on progress or the Marxist concept of history. I think therefore that a 'great historical question' or any generalization on the part of the microhistorians would not necessarily enslave them to a meta-narrative, an over-arching concept of history. Probably the authors of most of the books generally regarded as microhistory would refuse endorsing any meta-narrative, while they would still attempt a certain generalization. There are a lot of levels of generalizations that do not involve a metanarrative. So, Magnússon's dilemma of either 'grand narratives' or the 'singularization of history' might not be an adequate description of the options of the historian.

I argue that microhistory offers a deeper understanding of the past. But instead of what Magnússon regards as a danger of being enchained by meta-narratives, I think that generalization is not identical with serving a 'grand narrative'. In his *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg has a 'great historical question' insofar he is looking for an ancient, oral, materialistic popular culture of Indo-European origins in the strange views expressed by the sixteenth-

13 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 136–137, 151. To present another quotation: 'The process described above demonstrates that it is of great importance for historians to examine a source from as many different perspectives as possible, and seek to deconstruct its meaning and position within its proper context' (p. 145). Similarly, Sigurður Gylfi quotes approvingly John Brewer who argues for the microhistorical method the following way: the marginal research material should be 'properly investigated, i.e. placed or coded in its proper context (p. 149).

14 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 116, 146. A literal translation of meta- or grand narrative, what the 'big story' in the last quotation might exactly be, remains, however, unclear.

century Friulian miller, Menocchio.[15] But his book is no way in the service of any of the existing meta-narratives.

Finally, Magnússon displays a firm stance against all kinds of generalization, meaning that 'generalized knowledge is rarely useful' in 'resolving the puzzle'.[16] Instead of the many, the microhistorian is interested in 'the individual under consideration', 'the singular', the unique path of the daily life of each human being. But Magnússon is still positive about 'Davis's effort to throw light on a French village community in the sixteenth century,' 'throwing an interesting light [...] on the mindset of these sixteenth-century French villagers,' praises her 'focus on the lower classes of agrarian society, and especially the women' – which are all objectives more or less detached from the level of the 'individual under consideration'.[17] Here some steps have already been made towards a generalization.[18] When Magnússon sums up what Davis has gained – 'a perspective on the village community and how it functioned: family life, marriage, gender roles, justice and religion' – does not he endorse generalization himself? Quoting Richard D. Brown's praise about Patricia Cline Cohen's book amounts, yet again, as an endorsement of the microhistorians' desire to explore large worlds through the analysis of small cases: 'We are holding our eye up to the a peephole, that peephole reveals a wide expanse of culture and society, not a tiny chamber.' Magnússon concludes: 'Brown demonstrates that those who focus on the subject – and do not seek to generalize beyond what is justified – are more likely to discover important knowledge.' Moreover, Part II of *What is microhistory?* has arguments that clearly point towards the complementary roles of macro- and micro-approaches, towards a possible cooperation: 'The statistics, to be sure, give us a certain picture,' which 'remains an outline sketch until we fill in the details'.[19] In a similar way, when introducing the last episode in Chapter 5, Magnússon claims that here 'we

15 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

16 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 107. Is resolving a puzzle, then, the microhistorians' task?

17 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 107–109.

18 This is hardly to be wondered about, since Davis's original goal was to know more 'about the peasants' hopes and feelings; the ways in which they experienced the constraints and possibilities in their lives.' She wanted to know if they had choices, 'did individual villagers ever try to fashion their lives in unusual and unexpected ways?' (Davis, *The Return*, p. 1).

19 Somewhat surprisingly, Magnússon even calls his microhistory 'illustration': 'The story of the family of Gestsstaðir [...] can be taken as illustrative of the conditions that people like the parishes of Strandir had to put up with and get used to' (Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 100).

encounter a response to life and death among ordinary people [...], suggesting attitudes that can hardly be captured through the application of statistical demography alone'.[20]

At one point of his narrative, Magnússon makes the parallel of the doctor and the microhistorian, both rejecting 'generalized knowledge' as 'rarely useful'. I propose to see this alternative in a different light: doctors do, in fact, need a general knowledge of illnesses and the human body, this is 'useful' to them, although not sufficient in itself when trying to heal the illness of a particular patient. Similarly, the overview of Icelanders' living conditions was useful for Magnússon when explaining to the reader the lives of Halldór and Níels, but evidently not enough. Microhistorians, actually, need 'generalized knowledge'. All in all, we might wonder whether contextualization, meta-narratives and generalization, these dreaded riders are not those of the Apocalypse, their numbers are faulty, anyway, but rather the Magi bringing presents to the newborn microhistory.

I agree with Magnússon that 'microhistory is highly diverse'.[21] Although I might have failed to grasp it clearly, his concept of the 'singularization of history' should certainly be seen as one of the paths of microhistory. Another, I think, is the model of microhistory, based first and foremost on the research practice of the Italian founding fathers. This has micro-analysis, a 'great historical question' and agency as its three defining characteristics, as I have tried to argue in Part I of the book *What is Microhistory?*

Magnússon defends Natalie Zemon Davis against Robert Finlay's criticism and concludes that the Davis–Finlay debate shows the antagonism of embracing or rejecting postmodernism.[22] He argues that this is the major problem about microhistory. Magnússon intends to save microhistory from the dangers of its founding fathers' rejection of postmodernism.[23] For me, the main problem of microhistory seems to be a theoretical one of finding the micro-macro

20 Magnússon points out that Chapter 5 had the objective of contrasting the 'different conclusions' of a 'macro and micro approach.' While statistical evidence gave the overall picture of steady progress, the viewpoint of the individuals suggested something completely different. But, in fact, this opposition is far from evident. Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 89, 95, 106.

21 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 148.

22 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 112. Cf. Robert Finlay, 'The Refashioning of Martin Guerre', *American Historical Review* 93(1988), p. 553–571. Finlay did not criticize Davis's book because of its microhistorical character, this word does not even appear in his review, although he places the book in that tradition, evoking *Montaillou* and Menocchio's story (p. 553).

23 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 112, 113. We may wonder to what extent Magnússon's professed allegiance to postmodernism be brought into concordance with

link, this 'Northwest Passage of history'. From Magnússon's perspective, much of Part I is, therefore, simply irrelevant to microhistory: both the chapters of Part I about microhistorians' work who have made efforts to reach general conclusions, find answers to 'great historical questions', and the passages of Part I about the theoretical efforts made in order to find the 'micro-macro link', or, in other words, to solve the representativity problem of microhistory.[24] I, however, do not only insist that much of the existing microhistory – and first of all the Italian *microstoria* that is the only microhistory that cannot be denied this designation, being the inventors of the genre – lays a stress on generalization, tries to find an answer to a 'great historical question', but I also think that since history that arrives at general conclusions is held in a greater esteem of society, this insistence makes microhistory more valuable. Microhistorians, as I have seen, usually go out of their way to stress that even exceptional cases have a direct relevance to more general phenomena. In the book, I have quoted Johann Wolfgang Goethe to this effect: 'Each character, however peculiar it may be [...] has generality.'[25]

4 From Rome to Russia

Gabriella Erdélyi investigated a significant number of ordinary Hungarians who turned to the papal Court of Penitentiary in Rome between 1450 and 1550.[26] This rich archival material in Rome allowed her to sketch up a new vision of late medieval Hungarian society. Readers learn that lower social strata consequently used monastery schools to acquire knowledge and promote social advancement, that laypeople and lower clergy lived in a close symbiosis (resulting in frequent conflicts, too), and that law was simply regarded as an alternative to violence in the settlement of conflicts; people did not turn to courts to find peace with their adversaries, but to beat and humiliate them in yet another way when seeking vengeance.

In this book, microhistory is used without giving it full reins. The pages of Erdélyi's book are filled with short stories about individual lives. Although she

---

his hope 'to find an autonomous manifestation of the past'. (Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 136).

24 On these, see István M. Szijártó, 'The paths of microhistory', in: *Quaderni storici* 53 (2018), p. 917–928.

25 Magnússon–Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*, p. 58.

26 Gabriella Erdélyi, *Negotiating violence. Papal pardons and everiday life in East Central Europe (1450–1550)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

does not give her answers to 'great historical questions' through the in-depth analysis of a single case, this succession of cases in her book still gives it a microhistorical character. The picture of late medieval Hungary, offered in her book, is a result of the survey of the small cases documented in archives of the papal Court of Penitentiary and evoked in the pages of her book.

Here, I should say that microhistory plays the role of a junior partner. There are similar books in which the main argument is formed by macrohistorical considerations, but they include dozens of most interesting short case descriptions which bring their narratives quite close to those of microhistorical works. A further example is Joanne M. Ferraro's book about marital conflicts in late Renaissance Venice, where the Council of Trent established a curious practice, a substitution for divorce.[27] Dozens of cases from the patriarch's archive demonstrate how women initiated lawsuits to declare their marriage invalid or to obtain separation. They typically claimed that they had not given their free consent to their marriage decades previously. Separation was requested by as many as one woman each month. However, it is not statistical statements that impress readers most, but detailed case histories, like that of Camilla Belletto, who succeeded in invalidating her marriage that had happened a quarter of a century earlier. She was even allowed to re-marry later on. Such lawsuits were usually started only after the person forcing the marriage (usually the father) had died. If witnesses testified to physical violence threatening the life of the girl or the father threatened to disown her, the woman had a good chance of winning her case. Ferraro, therefore, concludes that although the sentence was declared by the court of the patriarch of Venice, real control over marriages was, in fact, exerted by the parties, the family and the local community.

Microhistory also plays the role of the junior partner in Orlando Figes's book about the fate of Russian families under Stalin. Similarly to Erdélyi's and Ferraro's books, several individual life stories give the material of *Whisperers*: memories and written sources of 450 people.[28] While it is Stalin determining the fate of Soviet Russia, the flesh on this bone is given by the everyday suffering of hundreds of Russian families. Dmitry Streletsky's family was sent as kulaks to a 'special settlement' in the North. Ten barracks, each for 500 people stood in the middle of the forest, surrounded by barbed wire. In 1933, bread rations were reduced to 50 grams a day, and half of the deported died. They survived by drinking blood. Nadezhda Puhova escaped from a kolkhoz in 1929, and worked in a Leningrad suburb in a machine factory. She married and they

27 Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage wars in late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

28 Orlando Figes, *The whisperers. Private life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

had a bed surrounded by a curtain in a room that they shared with 16 people, among them a prostitute who received her clients there during the night, a fireman who got up at 4 a.m., and in winter time her husband's relatives joined them, sleeping on the floor. She remembered that the room stank like stalls. Behind these microhistorical case stories, there is the gold cover of reality.

Set also in Russia, Adam Zamoyski's book about Napoleon's ill-fated campaign on Moscow in 1812 uses microhistory in a similar way, as a junior partner, only to give it even more place as here each actor forms his or her history. Despite the emperor's order to form them into infantry units, Colonel Marbot sent back those soldiers of his cavalry regiment, who remained without a horse. (Zamoyski thinks that if Napoleon had done so, he could have won the Leipzig campaign in 1814.) Marbot was careful to buy warm clothing for his men already in September 1812 and, essentially, he heeded the Polish cavalry officers' advice to put clawed horseshoes on the mounts. Most of his colleagues did not care to do so and, as a result, the French cavalry was soon incapacitated during the retreat.[29] Agency, a key factor according to Italian *microstoria*, is clearly demonstrated in Zamoyski's narrative. Soldiers did not only suffer a sad fate but were also active in forming it.

5 Microhistory as a Junior Partner

The aformentioned books do not explore a single case in depth to present their answers to great historical questions. Here, microhistory is a junior partner, but it clearly makes a better history out of more traditional, basically macro oriented historical works. They present the lived experience of past people to readers, and their detailed micohistorical narratives distinguish these four books from mainstream historical works. For me, this seems to be a possible path of microhistory, built on a partnership rather than a rivalry of the macro and micro approaches. The potentials of this arrangement are amply illustrated by a fifth book of which the author is no one else but Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon.

As co-author in an overview of microhistory, he highlighted our differences (which I prefer to interpret in terms of complementarity) in his recent article published in *Quaderni Storici*.[30] However forcibly advocating 'the singularization of history', Magnússon's book on the social history of 19th–20th-century

29 Adam Zamoyski, *1812: Napoleon's fatal march on Moscow* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

30 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, 'A 'new wave' of microhistory? Or: It's the same old story – a fight for love and glory', in: *Quaderni Storici* 52 (2017), p. 560–563.

Iceland can still be best characterized as an example of 'microhistory as a junior partner.'[31] The book combines the general statements of Icelandic national history with the details of microhistory. The backbone of Magnússon's argumentation is formed by a string of macro-oriented chapters in which the conventional tools of the social historian are employed. These chapters tell about the motorized trawler bringing about the breakthrough of capitalism in Iceland, drawing people to the coast, especially to Reykjavík, giving them work in industrialized fishing, bringing about the urbanization and modernization of the society. We read about changes in demography and household structure.

Magnússon focusses on the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. His insights are based on personal diaries and private correspondence. Not surprisingly, after the first one hundred pages, the book is overtaken by a microhistorical approach. He presents old rural Iceland and its surprising attraction to the written word on the one hand, and the continuity of the traditional life-style and mentality amongst the modernizing tendencies of the first half of the 20th century on the other. The evocation of personal sources and experiences bring Icelandic past very close to the reader of the book. That is, Magnússon uses microhistory here as a junior partner to his 'social history of Iceland', just as Erdélyi, Ferraro, Figes and Zamoyski has done, enlisting microhistory into their intellectual line-up, without relying exclusively on its capacities.

If in these cases, microhistory could help to bring general conclusions closer to the readers, the next path to be explored is rather a way in which microhistory might bring readers closer to general conclusions. While some observers have suggested an alternation of macro and micro approaches in historical studies, I would like to suggest another type of partnership of microhistory with the macro approach, in which microhistory might step in as national history.[32]

6 Towards Microhistory 2.0

Let me take the example of 18th-century Hungary. A microhistorical approach to this century of national history would take its starting point in the 'great

31 Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with words. A social history of Iceland* (London: Reaktion, 2010).

32 Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The last things before the last*, completed by Paul Oskar Kristeller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 104–138; John Lewis Gaddis, *The landscape of history: How historians map the past* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 81–84.

historical questions' as recognized by experts of the field. The actual scholarly discourse of the field was dominated by questions about the links that tied Hungary into the monarchy of the Habsburgs and the problems of capital accumulation in Hungarian economy as well as the appearance and acceptance of new phenomena, e.g. Enlightenment versus the persistance of the *ancien régime*.

In the earliest example of Hungarian microhistory, Lajos Für's *The Riot in Bercel*, the author sets out to explore why a landlord beat another half-dead on 23 May 1784, in the village of Bercel in Eastern Hungary, when allocating the plots for the peasants to cultivate water-melon. Für explores a hitherto hardly known world to answer his question. On reaching the end of his book, the reader's sympathies are overturned: we find out that the victim of slight build, Lajos Olasz was a ruthless exploiter, while the strong assailant, Boldizsár Bessenyei, appears to be an impoverished representative of a patriarchal approach, defending villagers from Olasz.[33]

The integration of Hungary into the monarchy of the Habsburgs is a multi-faceted issue that cannot be summed up briefly: it has its military and political–constitutional aspects, but an economic aspect, too. Since the end of the fifteenth century, Hungary was integrated into the world economy as a semi-periphery, in particular by supplying agricultural produce. Selling grain would be the greatest of all businesses from the mid-nineteenth century, when the coming of the railways made transportation possible – but only then.

In the above mentioned conflict in Bercel, Bessenyei told the peasants that Olasz 'brings the *portio* on you each year'.[34] *Portio* (portion) was the amount of foodstuffs due to a soldier or his horse in a month. It was common practice that Habsburgs stationed their armies in Hungary in peacetime, since food was cheaper there. It also meant that a part of the foreign, Western European market, still unreachable in this period without railways, 'moved into' Hungary itself. So, it was possible, even feasible, that Lajos Olasz, who was an innovator in agriculture, and tried to maximize the agricultural output in his lands, made steps that an army unit should be stationed in the village of Bercel. Since this always entails a whole range of problems, this was certainly unpopular among the inhabitants. This short sentence suggests, however, that a hitherto unex-

33 Lajos Für, *A berceli zenebona, 1784. Kísérlet a történelmi pillanat megragadására* (Budapest: Osiris, 2000).

34 A Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Record Office] Szabolcs vármegye levéltára, *Acta judicialia, Inquisitiones* IV.9.b *fasc.* XIII [Documents of the County Court of Szabolcs, Inquiries, fascicle XIII] Question no. 7/7.

plored interest might have been at work in the integration of Hungary into the Habsburg monarchy, usually interpreted in the categories of national suppression and economic colonization.

Another major problem to be addressed by the historians of 18th-century Hungary is the limited capacity or even incapacity of the mainly agrarian economy to accumulate capital – seen by contemporaries and historians alike as the major hindrance of the country's development. Analyses of a bishop's last will and a miller's probate inventory might serve as a good starting point to make an iconoclastic statement.

Márton Padányi Biró was bishop of Veszprém in Northern Transdanubia from 1745 to 1762. Queen Maria Theresa granted him the right to make a testament, in which he gave a comprehensive account of all the money spent by him during his bishopric of 17 years. Although the Royal Hungarian Chamber estimated the incomes of the bishop of Veszprém to 20.000 forints a year, he actually accounted for no less than 531.000 forints and bequeathed 202.000 forints more, which is 43.000 a year, more than two times more than his estimated incomes.[35] We should bear in mind that, in the 18th century, agricultural producers (aristocratic, gentry or ecclesiastical landholders alike) tried to exert ready money from their land. Produce that was not sold but eaten or given to serfs as a payment, was not counted as a revenue. But we can see that even the monetary result of the agricultural production was much higher than the contemporary estimate. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the case of a nearby miller, who was not a Hungarian Menocchio, still, the documents about his life are similarly revealing – at least as far as capital accumulation is concerned.

On 5 March 1798, in the northwestern county of Veszprém, the miller of Iharforráskút (off the village of Inota) was brutally murdered by a gang who robbed his house. In the resulting trial, an inventory of János Schmick's complete wealth was taken to ensure that the orphans' interests were subsequently observed. It becomes clear that it was not by chance that the robbers picked Schmick as their target: he was a very wealthy man indeed, he had 15.000 forints, but more than 80% of his complete wealth was loaned out on interest.[36] Also, this case gives us a chance to think about the economy (practically the

35 István Hermann and Réka Jakab (eds.), *Padányi Biró Márton veszprémi püspök végrendelete, 1762* (Veszprém: A Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Veszprém Megyei Levéltára, 2013), p. 18–22.

36 Beáta Bacskai, *Schmick János hagyományai. Egy 18. századi molnármester élte és halála a források tükrében* (Budapest: Loránd Eötvös University, 2004), p. 6–10. [Unpublished MA thesis].

agriculture) of eighteenth-century Hungary. It can be shown that the critical point was the feudal legal system that made noble landowners mere users of their land. They were not allowed to alienate landholdings since other members of his family (future members and far-off relatives included) also had a right to possession, with the King of Hungary standing at the end of the queue, having a final claim to the land in case the noble family died out. With this principle of *aviticitas* (*ősiség*) in force, landholdings could not serve as a security of loans, and without credit, agriculture, that is Hungary's economy, could not be modernized. This turned out to be the key issue of Hungarian politics in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This is the mainstream historical narrative. But if we look at the case of our miller, and here the iconoclastic capacities of microhistory are clearly demonstrated, we learn that he was able to accumulate between 1791 (when his first wife died and a first inventory was taken of his possessions) and his death seven years later (when the second inventory was taken) 7600 forints, doubling his wealth, by managing a single mill which he leased from the landowner. To give you some indication as for the value of this amount: the salary of the official viscount, who practically ran the county, the *ordinarius vicecomes* was something between 600 and 800 forints a year in Hungary in this period, which makes 4200 or 5600 forints for seven years – an amount inferior to the miller's incomes.[37] Schmick had returns of more than 10 per cent each year on his complete wealth. (For loans, 5 or 6 per cent was usual.) Much of this may have been a result of usury. But his first capital came from his mill and the interests on loans were subsequently paid by other actors of agriculture. This suggests that the capacity of Hungarian agriculture to accumulate capital under the so called 'feudal' or *ancien régime* is significantly underrated, and the actual working of the financial system should be investigated in depth.

Microhistorical investigations may present us not only a radically different picture but may also suggest its novel comprehension. To give an example, finally, the eternal question of continuity and change can also be addressed using the approach of microhistory. In 1766–1767 the County of Somogy in southwestern Hungary had to face a strange legal conflict.[38] First, a landowner

37 This salary was 600 forints a year in the County of Békés in 1794, while in the County of Zala it was 700 forints in 1774, and 800 forints in 1780. (Julianna Erika Héjja, *Békés vármegye archontológiája és prozopográfiája, 1715–1848* (Gyula: Békés Megyei Levéltár, 2009), p. 92; András Molnár (ed.), *Zala megye archontológiája 1138–2000* (Zalaegerszeg: Zala Megyei Levéltár, 2000), p. 57).

38 A Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Somogy Megyei Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives, Somogy County Record Office] IV.1.b. P 1766–1767 20. [Minutes of the county assembly from 1766–1767] p. 1137–1190.

and then his widow submitted complaints against the postmaster of Babócsa, who sold wine in the village gravely hurting the landowners' rights and financial interests. It was clear that peasants had no right to sell wine in this village after Christmas – but the status of the postmaster was unclear. Though reputedly a lie, he claimed nobility, he was an employee of a royal service, and had a little land, too, where the horses of the postal service were grazing.

In Hungary, noble privilege and the political system built on the Hungarian estates' rights survived up to the revolution of 1848. This usually suggests to historians that society was stable, or at least that it was imprisoned into an old legal framework that is conveniently and misleadingly termed as 'feudal'. But the postmaster's case proves the inability of the old legal structure to deal with new developments. The county asked Queen Maria Theresa to 'restrain the postmaster of Babócsa to his rightful competences', but she threw the ball back to the County of Somogy asking which these competences were. Both local and central authorities seemed to be helpless facing new developments that had no set place in this traditional society. They were, no doubt, eroding old social structures at work.

If we, however, go back to the Bercel case, it will also be evident that forces of new and old were not easily distinguishable historical players, white and black pieces on a chessboard. In Bercel in 1784, clearly the landlord Lajos Olasz was beaten, who was the representative of progress in agriculture. His opponents, the impoverished Bessenyei family represented old traditional forms of production and patriarchy in their attitude to peasants. Traditional noble mentality and Enlightenment were fully compatible for them.

In the first microhistorical investigation, in the background of the history of a rural conflict the problems of supplying for the army can be discerned – which was in fact the major outlet for Hungarian agricultural surplus in the Habsburg Empire, very important for the landed interest in Hungary, and possibly a factor in the upholding of the union with the Habsburgs' western provinces. Bishop Padányi Biró's last will and the probate inventories of the poor miller revealed the unexpected level of the capacity inherent in the Hungarian agriculture to accumulate capital. The conflict in Bercel and a postmaster's illegal inn-keeping presents the two faces of time: the persistence of old mentalities even with leading Enlightenment figures and the appearance of new developments that rendered old institutions helpless. Maybe, we can conclude that a microhistorical approach might result in new understandings on the level of national history as well.

What I suggest here is, therefore, exploring a possible path for microhistory. Having studied the period in question for a long time, historians might take an opportunity to mix macrohistorical arguments and microhistorical case

studies so that the latter add the historical actors' experiences and representations to the learned explanations of the social historian. Microhistorical cases should be selected in a way that they represent the main historical problems of the age and explore these deeply so that they could suggest answers for the relevant 'great historical questions'. In this way, microhistory might not just question old orthodoxies, challenge established historical knowledge, or play the role of a junior partner to macro level arguments, but it might also use its capacity of forming a comprehensive historical picture. This new type of microhistory might even serve as national history.

Although Magnússon has no intention to establish a new orthodoxy, to prescribe how microhistory should be done, this is not always evident from his chapters. And maybe, despite my intentions, it is not evident from my chapters either, or from this essay. All I can do is to stress my conviction, that microhistory has several paths – an idea that is certainly shared by Magnússon as well. Cooperation of complementary macro- and micro-approaches is also one of these, and certainly not the least promising.

Exceptions That Prove the Rule: Biography, Microhistory and Marginals

Hans Renders

Too often a biography is an incentive for historians to declare the life story of a person as representative for a grand historical narrative. However, in order to expand our knowledge of the past, it is more useful to test whether a grand narrative needs to be corrected and nuanced precisely because of the interpretation of the life at hand. With that goal in mind, biographers should pay more attention to people who could be considered as marginal in a specific way. Not because their experiences would totally change our view of the past, but because they account for the agency perspective that continuously questions fixed historical interpretations. In this contribution the micro environment of a couple of these individuals will be tested against the macro story to which they are usually attributed by historians. This makes the city a fertile terrain for microhistorical research.

Pierre Assouline for example has written a history of the beautiful art deco hotel Lutetia, on the Boulevard Raspail in Paris. It's that kind of old hotel with hundreds of rooms where you can lose yourself and dream about those who have stayed there. In France, this novel was called 'the biography of Lutetia'.[1] Assouline, who limits himself to the years 1938–1945, has created, with masterful skill, a credible combination of historiography and fiction, populated with psychologically rich characters: the story is told by the hotel detective, Edouard Kiefer, the only character in the book who is not based on historical sources: an invented person. This artifice provides the author the possibility to choose the perspective of a historian who oversees the whole story from the beginning.

In order to be able to carry out his duties effectively and discreetly, Kiefer has all sorts of special privileges. He is free to go anywhere in the hotel, has a master key that opens all doors and has a right to peruse the hotel guest book. He stands for hours in the foyer, the bar or in the corridors, observing all who pass. All the time he is busy updating a set of note cards for each of the guests. The Clary couple goes out. Kiefer just looks in the hotel register: 'room 523, Comédie Française, *Asmodée* by François Mauriac'. Kiefer makes a

1 Pierre Assouline, *Lutetia* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005).

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004498891_019

note of this visit on the note card. Concerning Roger Martin du Gard, Nobel Prize winner for literature, Kiefer makes a record of the fact that he carries on an intense correspondence with Jules Romains and Stefan Zweig. The hotel detective sees everything. A former minister who uses the Lutetia as a pied-à-terre in Paris turns his attention to the uniformed bell-hops as soon as his wife has returned to their home in the countryside.

Assouline gained access to the hotel archives and from dozens of biographies and other books he knows that famous guests like Samuel Beckett, Marc Bloch, James Joyce, Charles de Gaulle and Peggy Guggenheim frequented the Lutetia. He also knows that Blaise Cendrars refused to register for room number 13 (which did not in fact exist). He knows many secrets but is discreet, about himself, too. Even in his own room, he has wrapped the book he is reading in brown paper, in case someone suddenly enters.

Kiefer's note cards would make a useful archive for the police, but the hotel detective does not allow that to happen. André Gide is removed from the Lutetia, thanks to the vice squad's own detective work. Assouline also addresses the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' and it is in this conception that Kiefer finally reveals his true self. He becomes deeply aware of anti-Semitism and Assouline shows him thinking about many well-known events in France. Thus, Jacques Bonsergent (now known only as a metro station) passes by, the first Parisian to be executed by the occupying forces. In August 1944, the hotel falls into the hands of the Allies. Waves of deportees are housed in the Lutetia. It takes a year following the liberation for life to return to normal. The Lutetia is then, after seven years, finally once again the Lutetia that it was of old.

Another book that I'll mention here in connection with Paris is *Metronome*. In it, Loràn̂t Deutsch writes about Paris as seen from 21 metro stations.[2] It is a splendid idea to write a history of Paris on the basis of the metro stations, as if they are the backbone of the city. This is so not only because Saint-Michel, Châtelet-Les Halles and La Défense are even known to tourists and lie spread out across the city, but because in order to build the stations it was necessary to dig deep under the city, resulting in many archeological finds. These excavations concerned royal tombs, graves for the nameless or relics of the bourgeoisie; in short, by digging literally deeper into history many stories about Paris came to light that seemed to be disappeared by the genesis of the official story on Paris.

2 Loràn̂t Deutsch, *Metronome, l'histoire de France au rythme du métro parisien* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Michel Lafon, 2009).

The city is the natural habitat of historiography. Political culture, architecture, literature, most art forms, as well as financial power are concentrated in the city. The popularity of city histories is thus hardly a surprise. Lately there has been an increase in histories of cities sporting the title 'biography'. Rather than use the histories of one or more individuals as an interpretational model for urban history, they use the label 'biography' to equate the city with a living organism that is subject to ephemeral events. Within this genre we can count the biography of London by Peter Ackroyd, in which the British capital is envisioned as a body with dreams and complexes, and others have written biographies of such cities as Antwerp, Rome and Vienna.

I have, nevertheless, my doubts about such metaphors. Assouline and Deutsch zoom in on groups of people who are clearly differentiated from other groups in the city and in that way try to revise the existing image of the entire city. Ackroyd and many others who pour the city as a whole into a narrow mold already in advance are following the 'larger story' and at most color in this story with appealing anecdotes. Is there something wrong with describing history on the basis of a powerful metaphor? Microhistorians do not start their work based on such a metaphor. Rather, they will try to question this grand metaphor by investigating abnormal events or marginal people. In twentieth century Dutch historiography, the city, and in particular the capital city, plays a central role, as it does everywhere else. It is there, after all, that the focus of culture, the economy and politics is located. However, by imaging the city to be a living organism, the temptation to shape the story according to the general lines of history is too large.

Microhistorians have thus far addressed their work mainly to processes outside the urban environment (Ginzburg, Levi and Le Roy Ladurie), but what is the relationship between urban developments and national history? Based on the very Dutch phenomenon of 'verzuiling' or 'pillarization' I will give an impression of how biography and microhistory can contribute to urban history by making clear the disadvantages of seeing the city as an organism in which the residents are heading for a predetermined destiny, as if how the residents must live is contained in the city's DNA.

Biography makes better history than history itself, so wrote the French writer and book dealer Louis-Gabriel Michaud in 1802 in his *Biographie de tous les hommes morts et vivants ayant marqué, à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. I'm selecting this adage in order to examine a number of processes in the twentieth century from a participant's shifting perspective. Or as the nineteenth century American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson stated: 'There is properly no history: only biography.' Too often microhistory is taken to be a method of explaining the large by narrating the small. Instead of employing that erroneous oversimpli-

fication, I would like to do the opposite: by testing the small against the large, to address the question of the representative value of the grand historical narrative.

In all handbooks on Dutch history in the twentieth century 'verzuiling' or 'pillarization' plays an important role. Pillarization is a term used to describe the politico-denominational segregation of Dutch society. These segments of society were (and in some areas, still are) 'vertically' divided into several 'pillars' (in Dutch: 'zuilen') according to different religions or ideologies. These pillars all had (or have) their own social institutions: their own newspapers, broadcasting organizations, political parties, trade unions, banks, schools, hospitals, universities, scouting organizations and sports clubs. Some companies even hired only personnel of a specific religion or ideology. This led to a situation where many people from one pillar had no personal contact with people from another pillar.

The Netherlands had (at least) three pillars: Protestant, Catholic and Social-democratic. Almost all Catholics were part of the Catholic pillar. Orthodox and conservative Protestants joined the Protestant pillar; industrial workers and Jews were part of the Socialist pillar. The political parties usually associated themselves with these pillars. And those who fell outside these segments, liberals, for example, and freethinkers, were placed in a separate pillar for remainders. Political parties, schools, housing associations and all aspects of public life were divided into those pillars. Social, cultural and political life were parceled out. This classification developed by the Dutch historian – living and working in the United States of America – Arend Lijphart, is clear and convincing.[3]

There is, nevertheless, from the perspective of a specific participant, an alternative story to be told. I'll consider two handbooks which have appeared quite recently and which create a picture of the Netherlands around 1900 and the Netherlands around 1950, respectively.[4] Something strange is going on in these books. Almost everything, such as art, education, politics, science, with the exception of church construction, is described from the perspective of the city and at the same time there's a short section in these books set aside under

3 Arend Lijphart, *The politics of Accomodation: pluralism and democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

4 Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren; with the collaboration of Marianne Braun and Douwe Draaisma, *1900. The age of bourgeois culture*, Royal Van Gorcum, Assen 2004, translated from the Dutch original by Lynne Richards and John Rudge; Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne; with the collaboration of Sandra van Voorst, Klaas van Berkel, Hans van Maanen, Frans Ruiter and Wilma Süto, *1950. Prosperity and welfare*, Royal Van Gorcum, Assen 2004, translated from the Dutch original by the Language Centre, University of Groningen.

the title 'City'. That is even more strange, when one realizes, I contend, that the city, within the pillarization model, played a minimal role. Work to be done, then.

The case of 'verzuiling' is complicated. In France, it simply doesn't exist. Religion, there, is practiced in its proper place: in the church, the mosque or the synagogue. There are undoubtedly foreign countries where the phenomenon of pillarization could be found, but nowhere in such an extreme form as in the Netherlands. You won't easily find a country where even housing associations are still organized according to pillars.

In studies of the history of film, the press, child rearing, education, in studies of just about everything of the Dutch past, the starting point again and again is the system of pillars. But since 1980, Lijphart's story has to some extent been put into perspective.[5] If one looks at the regional level rather than at national politics, one sees that the fragmenting influence of pillarization is not as omnipresent as one would have expected and that there was indeed interaction between the different segments of Dutch society. Studies of local communities have proven 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 identified in his study of national institutions. For example, national newspapers with the exception of *De Telegraaf* were strongly pillarized, but most inhabitants of the Netherlands read a regional – or city – newspaper and those were not pillarized at all.[6] The concept of 'pillarization' as noted in the concluding article that appeared in an edited volume in which the alleged effects of the pillarization at the local level were being analyzed, is a metaphor that is still being used to characterize a more complicated reality.[7]

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.[8] If we consider agency with regard to the

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

6 Hans Renders, *Wie weet slaag ik in de dood. Biografie van Jan Campert* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2004), p. 165–210; Hans Renders, 'Vergruisde zuilen. In katholieke kringen', in: *Vrij Nederland*, March 31, 2001.

7 Blom, 'Balans', p. 236. Two of the following examples of pillarization and 'antipillarization' were used also in: 'The Limits of Representativeness. Biography, Life Writing and Microhistory', in: Hans Renders en Binne de Haan, *Theoretical Discussions to Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Wrting* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

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

religious sphere, we find that 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 investigate public life during the era of pillarization. What influence was exerted on individuals who lived in a strict organization of Catholic, Protestant and Socialist institutions that they felt uncomfortable with it? Are these individual people only marginal figures? There are good reasons to believe that they are not.

Consider literature. Not only was daily life at the time parceled out according to pillars, the history of literature was divided in pillars as well. There are numerous examples of biographies of Catholic or Protestant writers in which upbringing and education are used to describe a career in a Catholic and Protestant context. There are also some examples of biographies in which writers clashed with their social environment on moral grounds, but we rarely see in these biographies a rigorously drawn difference in perspective with respect to the concept of pillarization.[9] That is undoubtedly a result of the fact that the writing of biographies has, up to the present day, been carried out according to pillars. Biographies of Catholics are written by Catholics; Social Democrats write the biographies of their champions, and so on. In the biography of the Roman Catholic critic and poet Anton van Duinkerken, Roman Catholic life during the period of its flourishing in the first half of the 20th century is a context of steel 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 subject it to a more probing interpretation or to attempt to determine whether there were other Catholic writers who in effect lived against their will in that steel cage.

It is 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 cultural history is dominated by the liberal arts, which previously were located in the small margins of society outside the 'pillarized' spheres (exemplified in the Netherlands, with regard to literature, by the 'Tachtigers', writers from the Eighties Movement in the nineteenth century, and the periodical *Forum* in the thirties, 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 macrohistoriography. Now one can say that history has shown that liberal writers were

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

better writers than those 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 history of Dutch literature is heavily overstated by general concepts about pillarization, 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 pillarization. In diaries and letters indications can be found that the typical characteristic of the most pillarized writer was that he indeed aspired to escape from the pillar he 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.[10] We can consider the biography of the prominent Catholic writer and journalist Bertus Aafjes. In the heyday of pillarization, Aafjes published his book *Het gevecht met de muze* [The Fight with the Muse] in 1940 at the neutral publishing house J.H. Meulenhoff, a company known for not willing to serve ideological purposes. Despite his reputation as a great Catholic writer, Aafjes for decades was associated with Meulenhoff, and this collaboration resulted in many publications.[11] Biographical research and especially an insightful interpretation of their lives leads to the conclusion that Aafjes tried to enter the liberal pillar through the neutral publishing house Meulenhoff. What new insights would emerge if instead of his representativeness, Aafjes were to be investigated from the agency-perspective? In other words: what results would it yield to interpret Aafjes not from the perspective of the Catholic pillar but from his individual efforts precisely to escape this pillar? And his ambition to change his environment is especially meaningful; 'social change' in history is always a powerful force for change in any sense whatsoever. Biographers therefore should act more often as microhistorians do and deliberately ask themselves where the breaking points in the studied life can be found. They should try more often to interpret the facts of a life as representing deviation instead of looking for a socially valid confirmation of life experiences. The misunderstanding behind almost every biography is that a biographer does not need basic theoretical assumptions, as if the sources and facts speak for themselves, whereas those sources and facts in a certain way are being presented by invisible, institutionalized hands.

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

11 Frank de Glas, *De regiekamer van de literatuur. Een eeuw Meulenhoff 1895–2000* (Zutphen: Walburgpers, 2012), p. 27.

Pillarization could very effectively be put into perspective by studying, in a very deliberate way, 'dissidents' or exceptions, in order to be able, then, to determine whether they are 'normal exceptions' or 'exceptional normals'. Take, for example, the strictly organized Catholic pillar. In the past, the stress was all too easily placed on the unity, solidarity and obedience of the Catholic community. There are abundant examples which demonstrate that, from the beginning of the twentieth century, the Catholic elite struggled enormously to keep its members in the segregated organizations. It is of course important to know that as late as the 1950s most Catholics voted for the political party which was prescribed for them by the Church's encyclicals and charges, but the fact that nearly twenty percent of them did not is an indication of the significant fragmentation which existed in the Catholic community. The literary periodical *De Gemeenschap*, established in 1925, attempted in a systematic way to introduce modern art, then almost by definition art which was not Catholic, to their Catholic subscribers. But in existing studies of this distinctive magazine one reads very little about the contribution of the non-Catholics: S. van Ravesteijn, H. Marsman or A. den Doolaard.

In other pillars, too, dissidents could be found; all in all, by 1930, half of the Dutch population had little or nothing to do with a pillar.[12] The iconoclasts of pillarization were everywhere. Around 1925, the Catholic notary J.B. Luykx from Hilversum fought for a general, national not-pillarized broadcasting station.[13] He almost succeeded in preventing the establishment of the Catholic Radio Broadcasting Company. He even received the support of Catholics. These champions of unaffiliated radio were accused by conservative fellow believers of being agents of Freemasonry and anti-papist coconspirators.

The contradictory positions within the Catholic pillar can be exposed by the 'biographical approach'. The diaries of the Roman Catholic leader Gerard Brom show that individual Catholics had difficulties with the rules prescribed by the priest or bishop. When Brom falls in love with a Protestant girl, he is almost driven to suicide. In the end, he realizes that he himself also does not want a 'non-Catholic wife', but fortunately she converts and they can marry after all. Brom felt frustrated because, as professor in Nijmegen, he was not allowed to have any contact with non-Catholic colleagues. Contradicting a Catholic politician was punished with surveillance by a censor, all under the guise of Catholic emancipation.

12 Paul Luykx, *Andere katholieken. Opstellen over Nederlandse katholieken in de twintigste eeuw* (Nijmegen: SUN, 2000).

13 Luykx, p. 165–166.

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 nonfiction within sources is not considered important. With equal ease Charles Dodgson, who published *Alice in Wonderland* under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, 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.[14]

An innocent example in which the agency perspective from a microhistorian point of view can be tested against general history, is the story of Hans Jacoby and the Putsch of Hitler in 1923. On the morning of November 9, 1923, Munich was still in a shock after the failed Putsch by Hitler, but individual testimonials from residents of Munich at the time tell that almost nobody knew exactly 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 over. What exactly had happened, the Jewish Jacoby did not understand until much later.[15]

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 trans-

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

15 Hans Renders and Paul Arnoldussen, 'Toen kwam Colijn binnen. Kaart Abessinië!', in: idem, *Jong in de jaren dertig. Interviews* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2003, first edition: de Prom, Baarn 1999), p. 144–145.

forms microhistory into a socio-anthropological affair.[16] Too often it 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.[17] It teaches us rather more about other social relationships which exercised unexpected impact on general history.

For example, 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. By changing the agency perspective our framework of interpretation concerning the Second World War has changed enormously; from the victim perspective to the perpetrator perspective. The memoirs of Fest (the small dimension), have provided an occasion to interpret the whole war story (the big dimension) in a slightly different way. The many biographies and memoirs of war villains and victims have put into perspective the stories of the Dutch war historian Loe de Jong and in England the war narratives by Hugh Trevor Roper. 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.[18]

There are numerous examples that show that the dominant historical narrative must be put into perspective. Microhistorians study individuals using literally all the resources they can find, in order to gain better insight into general issues. The eventual outcome of microhistorical research, which also can be biographical research, should not be known in advance. Biography does not need to 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 requires a different image of this person. In other words: questioning the representativeness of an individual opens up new vistas in research, and this especially comes to the fore when we for example pay attention to our marginals in the cities.

The examples mentioned in this article, illustrate that 'marginals' only are 'marginal' from the perspective of a dominant conception of history. In

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

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

18 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).

the Netherlands, the construction of 'pillarization' has become the dominant interpretative framework. But precisely in the big cities, where publishers and newspaper editors exert great influence on public opinion, pillarization did not play such a major role at all. The respected Catholic writers in the cities in retrospect appear, stated with some exaggeration, to have been marginals in their own social environment.

Bibliography

Adriaens-Pannier, Anne, and Frederik Leen (eds.), *Avant-Garde in België 1917–1929* (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet 1992).

Allen, Richard and Malcolm Turvey (eds.), *Wittgenstein, Theory, and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Amato, Joseph A. *Jacob's Well. A case for rethinking family history* (St. Paul, MN: The Minnesota Historical Society, 2008).

Amigoni, David, *Victorian biography: intellectuals and the ordering of discourse* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

Assouline, Pierre, *Lutetia* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005).

Atkinson, Juliette, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered. A Story of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Atlas, James, *The Shadow in the Garden: A Biographer's Tale* (New York: Pantheon, 2017).

Aurell, Jaume, *Authoring the Past: History, Autobiography and Politics in Medieval Catalonia* (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Aurell, Jaume, *Theoretical perspectives on historians' autobiographies: from documentation to intervention* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Bacskai, Beáta, *Schmick János hagyományai. Egy 18. századi molnármester élte és halála a források tükrében* (Budapest: Loránd Eötvös University, 2004), 6–10. [Unpublished MA thesis].

Baernstein, P. Renée, *A Convent Tale. A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Bair, Deidre, *Parisian Lives: Samuel Beckett, Simone de Beauvoir and Me* (New York: Doubleday, 2019).

Balk, Hildelies, *De kunstpaus. H.P. Bremmer 1871–1956* (Bussum: Thoth, 2006).

Bank, Jan, and Maarten van Buuren; with the collaboration of Marianne Braun and Douwe Draaisma, *1900. The age of bourgeois culture* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), translated from the Dutch original by Lynne Richards and John Rudge.

Barthes, Roland, 'Histoire et Littérature: à propos de Racine', *Annales ESC*, XV, 1960, 3, p. 524–537.

Bartkevicius, Jocelyn, 'A Form of One's Own: Virginia Woolf's Art of the Portrait Essay', *The Iowa Review*, 22, no. 1 (1992), p. 123–134.

Beales, Derek, 'History and Biography, An inaugural lecture' in: T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine (eds.), *History and Biography: Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996 f.p. 1981), p. 266–283.

Bell, Quentin, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, Volume 2, Mrs Woolf, 1912–1941* (Frogmore, St Albans: Triad/ Paladin, 1976).

Berenson, Edward, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

Berg, Hubert van den, 'Avant-garde art as art at the service of the revolution. On pure art and *Tendenzkunst* as two answers to the question: "Should the new art serve the masses?"', in: Kari J. Brandtzaeg (ed.), *The shadow of war. Political art in Norway 1914–2014/ Krigens skygge. Politisk kunst in Norge 1914–2014* (Oslo: Teknisk Industri, 2015), p. 54–65.

Berg, Hubert F. van den, 'Expressionism, constructivism and the transnationality of the historical avant-garde', in: Hubert F. van den Berg and Lidia Głuchowska (eds.), *Transnationality, Internationalism, and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Leuven: Peeters 2013), p. 23–41.

Berghahn, Volker and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

Biess, Frank, *German Angst. Fear and Democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Bix, Herbert P., *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

Bjarnason, Gunnar Þór, *Spænska veikin* (Reykjavík: Forlagið, 2000).

Bleikasten, André, *William Faulkner: A Life Through the Novels* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

Bliss, Michael, *Right Honourable Men. The Descent of Canadian Politics from Macdonald to Mulroney* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994).

Blom, Hans and Jaap Talsma, *De verzuiling voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000).

Blom, Philipp, *The Vertigo Years: Europe 1900–1914* (New York: Basic, 2008).

Blotner, Joseph, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974).

Blotner, Joseph, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1984).

Boddice, Rob, *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion, 2019).

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Homo academicus* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1984).

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

Bourke, Joanna, 'Foreword', in Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes, and Claudia Siebrecht, *Total War. An Emotional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Boyer, Paul and Stephan Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed. The social origins of witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Braembussche, Antoon van den, 'Biografie en mediageschiedenis', in: *Jaarboek mediageschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Stichting Beheer IISG/Stichting Mediageschiedenis, 1995), p. 11–19.

Broadwell, Paula, with Vernong Loeb, *The education of General David Petraeus* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

Brodsky, Louis Daniel and Robert W Hamblin (eds.), *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection, The Letters, Volume 2* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984).

Brown, Irene Quenzler, and Richard D. Brown, *The Hanging of Ephraim Wheeler. A story of rape, incest and justice in early America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

Bru, Sacha, *Democracy, Law and the Modernist Avant-Gardes. Writing in the State of Exception* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1984).

Burke, Peter, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the History of Mentalities', History of European Ideas 7, no. 5 (1986): p. 439–451.

Bush, Stephen S., *William James on Democratic Individuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Butterfield, Herbert, 'The Role of the Individual in History', in: *History* (*New Series*) 40, (1955)138–139, p. 1–17.

Cabrera, Miguel A., *Postsocial History. An Introduction*, transl. Marie McMahon (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004).

Caine, Barbara, *Biography and History* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Calvet, Louis-Jean, *Roland Barthes. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1992).

Carlyle, Thomas, *The Life of John Stirling* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1851).

Carlyle, Thomas, 'Boswell's life of Johnson', *Fraser's Magazine* vol. 5(1832)28, p. 379–413, in: R.W. Emerson (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle: Modern British Essayists*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Hart, Carey & Hart, 1852).

Carlyle, Thomas, 'Lecture 1: The Hero as Divine [1840]' in: Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Project Gutenberg, November 1997), www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext97/heros10.txt.

Carlyle, Thomas, *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called 'Frederick the Great'*, 21 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–73): Project Gutenberg, https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=1091.

Carlyle, Thomas, 'Biography', in: *Fraser's Magazine* 59(1832)27, p. 253–260.

Carlyle, Thomas, 'On History', in: Carlyle, *Historical Essays*, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Caro, Robert A., *The Power Broker. Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

Caro, Robert A., *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982–2012): vol. 1, *The Path to Power* (1982); vol. 2, *Means of Ascent* (1990); vol. 3, *Master of the Senate* (2002); and vol. 4, *The Passage of Power* (2012).

Caro, Robert A., *Working: Researching, Interviewing, Writing* (New York: Knopf, 2019).

Carpenter Wilde, Meta and Orin Borsten, 'Hollywood 1943', in: *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection Volume IV: Battle Cry, A Screenplay by William Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985).

Carpenter Wilde, Meta and Orin Borsten, *A Loving Gentleman: The Love Story of William Faulkner and Meta Carpenter* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

Carr, E.H., *What is History?* (New York: Random House, 1961).

Cassiman, Bart, *Felix de Boeck of de weg van de plastique pure sentimentale naar het vergeestelijkt realisme*, unpublished thesis (Ghent: Rijksuniversiteit Gent 1984).

Cawthon, David, 'Marx on leadership', in: *Philosophical Foundations of Leadership* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Charle, Christoph, *Les élites de la République 1880–1900* (Paris: Fayard, 2006 (1987)).

Chartier, Roger, 'Text, Symbols, and Frenchness', in: *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985), p. 682–695.

Churchill, Suzanne W., *The little magazine* Others *and the renovation of modern American poetry* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006).

Churchill, Suzanne W. and Adam McKible (eds.), *Little magazines & modernism. New approaches* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).

Cipolla, Carlo M., *Faith, Reason, and the Plague in Seventeenth-Century Tuscany* (New York, Norton & Company, 1979).

Clark, Stuart, *The Annales School. Critical Assessments, vol. 1, Histories and Overviews* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

Cohen, Patricia Cline, *The Murder of Helen Jewett. The life and death of a prostitute in nineteenth-century New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

Collins, Roger, *Keepers of the Keys of Heaven. A History of the Papacy* (London: Phoenix, 2009).

Cook, Alexandra Parma, and Noble David Cook, *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance. A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

Cooley, Elizabeth, Revolutionizing Biography: 'Orlando', 'Roger Fry', and the Tradition', *South Atlantic Review*, 55, no. 2 (1990), p. 71–83.

Coutau-Bégarie, Hervé, *Le phénomène 'Nouvelle histoire'. Stratégie et idéologie des nouveaux historiens* (Paris: Economica, 1983).

Curnutt, Kirk, *William Faulkner* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

Curthoys, Ann and Ann McGrath, *How to Write History that People Want to Read* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Cusset, François, *French Theory. Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutatoins de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats–Unis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).

Daddow, Olliver, 'The Ideology of Apathy: Historians and Postmodernism', *Rethinking History*, VIII, 2004, 3, p. 417–437.

Dallek, Robert, *Nixon and Kissinger* (London: Penguin, 2008).

Dam, Peter van, 'Een wankel vertoog: over ontzuiling als karikatuur', in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis van Nederland* 126 (2011), p. 52–77.

Damasio, Antonio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (London and New York: Penguin, 2005).

Darnton, Robert, 'It happened one night', in: *New York Review of Books*, 51 (no. 11, 24 June 2004), p. 60–64.

Darnton, Robert, 'The Symbolic Element in History', in: *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986), p. 218–234.

Darnton, Robert, *The Great Cat Massacre: And other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Random House, 1984).

De Salvo, Louise and Mitchell A. Leaska, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

Demos, John P., *Entertaining Satan. Witchcraft and the culture of early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Derouet, Chistian (ed.), *Correspondance Fernand Léger-Léonce Rosenberg 1917–1937* (Paris: Musées National d'Art Moderne, 1996).

Deth, Ron van, and Walter Vandereycken, 'Food Refusal and Insanity: Sitophobia and Anorexia Nervosa in Victorian Asylums', *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 27, no. 4 (2000), p. 390–404.

Deutsch, Loràn̂t, *Metronome, l'histoire de France au rythme du métro parisien* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Michel Lafon, 2009).

Dibbets, Karel H.F.M., *Sprekende films: de komst van de geluidsfilm in Nederland 1928–1933* (Amsterdam: Otto Cramwinckel, 1993).

Dilthey, Wilhelm, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (1910), in Bernard Groethuysen (ed.), *Wilhelm Dilthey. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VII (Stuttgart and Göttingen: Teubner and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1927).

DiMaio, V.J.M. and J.C. Garriott, 'A fatal Overdose of Paraldehyde during Treatment of a Case of Delirium Tremens', *Journal of Forensic Science* 19, no. 4 (1974), p. 755–758.

Dixon, Thomas, 'What is the History of Anger a History of?', in: *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 4 (2020), p. 1–34.

Dodman, Thomas, 'Theories and Methods in the History of Emotions', in: Katie Barclay, Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, and Peter N. Stearns (eds.), *Sources for the History of Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 15–25.

Domburg, Adrianus J.P. van, *Walter Ruttmann en het beginsel* (Purmerend: J. Muusses, 1956).

Domburg, Adrianus J.P. van, *Levende schaduwen. Aantekeningen over film* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1936).

Dosse, François, 'La biographie à l'épreuve de l'identité narrative', in: *Cercles* (2015) 35, p. 12–36.

Dosse, François, *Histoire du structuralisme* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1995, 2 volumes).

Dosse, François, *Le pari biographique. Ecrire une vie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011 (2005)).

Duby, George, *Le dimanche de Bouvines* (1973); trans. C. Tihanyi, *The Legend of Bouvines* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

Ducke, Karl-Heinz, *zum Heil. Eine Untersuchung zur Morrallehre Hadrianus VI* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1976).

Duinkerken, Anton van [= W.M.J.A. Asselbergs], *De beweging der jongeren* (Hilversum: Paul Brand, 1933).

Dummitt, Christopher, *Unbuttoned. A History of Mackenzie King's Secret Life* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

Dunn, Waldo H., *English Biography* (London: Dent, 1916).

Durand, Pascal, 'D'une rupture intégrante. Avant-garde et transactions symboliques', in: *Pratiques* 50 (1986), p. 31–45.

Dusar, Lutgart, *Doorheen het leven van Felix de Boeck: zijn vormingsjaren en deelname aan de modernistische kunststrekkingen van de twintiger jaren, geplaatst in het kader van de Europese en Belgische kunstevolutie*, unpublished thesis (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven 1973).

Eagleton, Terry, *The Significance of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

Edel, Leon, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York: Norton, 1984).

Edel, Leon, 'The Biographer and Psychoanalysis', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 42(1961), p. 458–466.

Eisler, Colin, '"Every Artist Paints Himself": Art History as Biography and Autobiography', in: *Social Research* 54(1987)1, p. 73–99.

Elton, G.R., 'Herbert Butterfield and the Study of History', *The Historical Journal* 27(1984)3, p. 729–743.

Emich, Birgit, 'Een vreemdeling aan de macht. De Nederlandse paus Adrianus VI (1522–1523)', in: Frans Willem Lantink and Jeroen Koch (eds.), *De paus en de wereld. Geschiedenis van een instituut* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), p. 173–189, 413–419.

Endacott, Jason, 'An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model for Promoting Historical Empathy', in: *Social Studies Research and Practice* 8, no. 1 (2013), 41–58.

Engle, Madeleine L' and W. Heywood, *The Little Flowers of St Francis of Assisi* (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classic, 1998).

Erdélyi, Gabriella, *Negotiating violence. Papal pardons and everiday life in East Central Europe (1450–1550)* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018).

Evans, Richard J., *Eric Hobsbawm. A Life* (London: Little Brown, 2019).

Faassen, Sjoerd van and August Hans den Boef, "Ik moet zingen, altijd maar weer zingen van U'. Liefdesgedichten van Theo van Doesburg voor Lena Milius', in: *Jaarboek Letterkundig Museum* 8 (1999), p. 59–99.

Fabre, Gladys and Doris Wintgens Hötte (eds.), *Van Doesburg & the international avant-garde. Constructing a new world* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

Feldman Barrett, Lisa, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

Fernandez, James, 'Historians Tell Tales: Of Cartesian Cats and Gallic Cockfights', in: *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988), p. 113–127.

Ferraro, Joanne M., *Marriage wars in late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Ferreira Furtado, Júnia, *Chica Da Silva. A Brazilian Slave of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Fest, Joachim, *Ich nicht: Erinnerungen an eine Kindheit und Jugend* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2006).

Fetz, Bernhard (ed.), *Die Biographie – Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

Figes, Orlando, *The whisperers. Private life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

Finlay, Robert, 'The Refashioning of Martin Guerre', in: *American Historical Review* 93(1988), p. 553–571.

Fowler, Doreen, *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997).

Frank, Manfred, *Was ist Neustrukturalismus?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

Frank, Manfred, *Die Unhintergehbarkeit von Individualität. Reflexionen über Subjekt, Person und Individuum aus Anlaß ihre 'postmodernen' Toterklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

Frank, Manfred, *L'ultime raison du sujet. Essai* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1992).

Fraser, Antonia, *My History. A Memoir of Growing Up* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2015).

Freeman, Douglas S., *George Washington: A Biography* (New York, Scribner, 1948–1957).

Frevert, Ute, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2011).

Frevert, Ute, *Mächtige Gefühle. Von A wie Angst bis Z wie Zuneigung – Deutsche Geschichte seit 1900* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2020).

Frye, Northrop, 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility', in: *ELH* 23(1956)2, p. 144–152.

Für, Lajos, *A berceli zenebona, 1784. Kísérlet a történelmi pillanat megragadására* (Budapest: Osiris, 2000).

Gaddis, John Lewis, *The landscape of history: How historians map the past* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Gammerl, Benno, 'Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges', in: *Rethinking History* 16, no. 2 (2012), p. 161–175.

Garraty, John A., *The Nature of Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1957).

Garton, Stephen, 'The "Tyranny" of Doctors: The Citizen's Liberty League in New South Wales, 1920–39', *Australian Historical Studies* 24, no. 97 (1991): 340–358.

Gee, Malcolm, *Dealers, critics, and collectors of modern painting. Aspects of the Parisian art market between 1910 and 1930* (New York and London: Garland, 1981).

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

Geertz, Clifford, "From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', in: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 55–70.

Geurts, Twan, *De Nederlandse paus Adrianus van Utrecht 1459–1523* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2017).

Gillespie, Diane F. (ed.), 'Introduction', in: *Roger Fry: A Biography* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

Gillis, Mary Phyfer, *Faulkner's Biographies: Life, Art, and the Poetics of Biography* (unpublished thesis, The University of Alabama, 2002).

Ginzburg, Carlo, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Microhistory: Two or three things that I know about it,' in: *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993), p. 10–35.

Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in: Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, transl. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

Ginzburg, Carlo and C. Poni, 'Il nome et il come: Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico', trans. E. Branch (first published 1979) 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace', in: E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1991).

Girardet, Raoul, 'L'ombre de la guerre', in: Pierre Nora (ed.), *Essais d'ego–histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 152–153.

Givens, Bryan, *Judging Maria De Macedo, A Female Visionary and the Inquisition in Early Modern Portugal* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

Glas, Frank de, *De regiekamer van de literatuur. Een eeuw Meulenhoff 1895–2000* (Zutphen: Walburgpers, 2012).

Gleeson-White, Sarah (ed.), *William Faulkner at Twentieth Century-Fox: The Annotated Screenplays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Goldhagen, Daniel, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

Goldman, Jonathan, *Modernism is the literature of modernity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

Gooch, G.P., *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Centur* (London/New York: Longmans, Green, and co., 1913).

Government of New South Wales, *Hospitals for the Insane, New South Wales. Rules for Attendants, Nurses and Others* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1918).

Government of New South Wales, *Report of the Royal Commission on Lunacy Law and Administration with Notes of Evidence and Appendices* (Sydney: Alfred Kent, Government Printer, 1923).

Graaf, W. de, *Liefdevol bijsturen. Theo van Doesburg tussen huwelijk en verhouding* (Zoeterwoude: De Uitvreter, 1996).

Graaf, W. de, 'Over A.H. Feis. Een poging tot portret', in: A.H. Feis, *Oorlog. Verzen in staccato* (Woubrugge: Avalon Pers, 1981).

Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

Gray, John, *Isaiah Berlin. An Interpretation of his Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Greenberg, Clement, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in John O'Brien (ed.), *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume I Perceptions and Judgments*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1986), p. 5–22.

Griffin, Robert J. (ed.), *The faces of anonymity. Anonymous and pseudonymous publications from the sixteenth tot the twentieth century* (New York: McMillan, 2003).

Grimwood, Michael, *Heart in Conflict: Faulkner's Struggles With Vocation* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987).

Habermas, Tilmann, *Emotion and Narrative. Perspectives in Autobiographical Storytelling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Hálfdanarson, Guðmundur, 'Biskupasögur hinar nýju: um ævisögur fjögurra stjórnmálamanna', *Saga* (1993)31, p. 167–190.

Hamblin, Robert W., *Myself and the World: A Biography of William Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

Hamilton, Ian, *The little magazines. A study of six editors* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1976).

Hamilton, Nigel, *Monty: The Making of a General, 1887–1942* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

Hamilton, Nigel, *Master of the Battlefield: Monty's War Years, 1942–1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).

Hamilton, Nigel, *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987).

Hamilton, Nigel, *The Brothers Mann: The Lives of Heinrich and Thomas Mann, 1871–1950 and 1875–1955* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Hamilton, Nigel. *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992).

Hamilton, Nigel, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Hamilton, Nigel, *How To Do Biography: A Primer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Hamilton, Nigel, 'Biography as corrective', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in history* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 15–30.

Hamilton, Nigel and Hans Renders, *The ABC of Modern Biography* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2018).

Hannah L. Hedrick, *Theo van Doesburg. Propagandist and practitioner of the avant-garde, 1909–1923* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

Harline, Craig and Eddy Put, *A Bishop's Tale. Aathia Hovius Among His Flock in Seventeenth-Century Flanders* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

Harrington Tuke, Thomas, 'On Forced Alimentation', *Asylum Journal of Mental Science* 4, no. 24 (1858), p. 204–222.

Harrold, Charles Frederick, *Carlyle and German Thought, 1819–34* (New Haven and London: Archon Books, 1934).

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

Heinich, Nathalie, 'Pour en finir avec "l'illusion biographique"', in: *L'Homme* (2010) 195–196, p. 421–430.

Héjja, Julianna Erika, *Békés vármegye archontológiája és prozopográfiája, 1715–1848* (Gyula: Békés Megyei Levéltár, 2009).

Hemecker, Wilhelm, *History in Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

Hemecker, Wilhelm and Edward Saunders (eds.), *Biography in theory. Key Texts with Commentaries* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

Hermann, István, and Réka Jakab (eds.), *Padányi Biró Márton veszprémi püspök végrendelete, 1762* (Veszprém: A Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Veszprém Megyei Levéltára, 2013).

Heynickx, Rajesh, 'Space and mystic comtemplation. On the Self-Fashioning of Converted Avant-Gardists', in: *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 88, no. 4 (2010), p. 1277–1292.

Hitzer, Bettina, *Krebs fühlen. Eine Emotionsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2020).

Hochschild, Arlie Russell, *The Managed Heart. Commercilization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1983).

Höfler, Constantin von, *Papst Adrian VI, 1522/1523* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1880).

Holmes, Richard, *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer* (New York: Pantheon, 2016).

Hólmgeirsdóttir, Ragnhildur i.a., 'Hvað eru sögulegir tímar?' in: *Saga* 58(2020)2.

Homberger Eric, and John Charmley (eds.), *The Troubled Face of Biography* (New York; St. Martin's Press, 1988).

Hook, Sidney, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (New York: John Day Co. 1943).

Hornby, E. John, Jr, 'Geometrical and Graphical Solutions of Quadratic Equations', in: *The College Mathematics Journal* 21(1990)5, p. 362–369.

Howes, Craig, 'What are we turning from? Research and Ideology in biography and Life Writing', in Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 165–175.

Hughes, Kathryn, 'The death of Life Writing', in *The Guardian*, June 27, 2008.

Hughes-Hallett, Lucy, *Gabriele d'Annunzio. Poet, seducer, and preacher of war* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

Huizinga, Johan, *Erasmus* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1924).

Hunt, Lynn, 'French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the Annales', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21(1986) 2, p. 212–213.

Huysseune, Michel, 'Le constructivisme', in: Jean Weisgerber (ed.), *Les avant-gardes littéraires* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1991), p. 331–336.

Iggers, Georg G., *Historiography in the 20th Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (New York: Wesleyan, 2005).

Ignatieff, Michael, *Fire and Ashes. Success and Failure in Politics* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015).

Illies, Florian, *1913: het laatste gouden jaar van de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2013).

Illouz, Eva, *Cold Intimacies. The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Malden: Polity, 2013).

Illouz, Eva, *Warum Liebe endet. Eine Soziologie negativer Beziehungen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

Inge, M. Thomas, *William Faulkner* (Duckworth: Overlook Illustrated Series, 2006).

Inge, M. Thomas (ed.), *Conversations with William Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999).

Isaacson, Walter, *Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

Jaffe, Aaron, *Modernism and the culture of celebrity* (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

James, Henry, *The Aspern Papers: The turn of the screw; The Liar; The two Faces* (New York: Kelley, 1971).

James, William, 'Great men and their environment', *Atlantic Monthly*, no. 46 (October 1880), p. 227.

Jenkins, Keith, 'A Postmodern Reply to Perez Zagorin', in: *History and Theory*, XLIX, 2000, 2, p. 181–200.

Jenkins, Keith, *Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003, 3rd edition).

Jóhannesson, Guðni Th., 'Umræða um ekkert? Einföld og flókin skoðanaskipti sagnfræðinga um aðferð og afurð, sögur og sagnfræði, skor, skóga og tré', *Kistan*

5 April 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20070103041920/http://www.kistan.is/efni.asp?n=3574&f=15&u=94.

Jóhannesson, Guðni Th., 'Þjóðin og fræðin. Nokkur orð um tilvistarvanda sagnfræðings sem varð forseti', https://www.forseti.is/media/1838/2017_03_10_hugvisindathing.pdf.

Jóhannesson, Guðni Th., 'Icelanders or Norwegians? Leifur, Snorri, and national identity then and now', https://www.forseti.is/media/2006/2017_03_23-nationalism_eng.pdf.

Jóhannesson, Guðni Th., 'Defending Asgard, independence and human rights. The use of history in current affairs', https://www.forseti.is/media/5893/2020_03_04_polland_un_warsaw.pdf.

Johnson, Boris, 'What Would Maggie do Today?' Margaret Thatcher Lecture, *The Telegraph* 28 November 2013.

Johnson, Samuel, 'no. 60', in *The Rambler*, vol. 2 (London: 1752).

Jónsson, Már, *Arnas Magnæus Philologus (1663–1730)*. Viking Collection 20 (Odense: University of Southern Denmark, 2012).

Jordanova, Ludmilla, 'What's in a Name? Historians and Theory', in: *English Historical Review*, CXXVI, 2011, 523, p. 1456–1477.

Joyce, Patrick, *Democratic Subjects. The Self and the Social in Nineteenth–Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Joyce, Patrick, *Democratic Subjects. The Self and the Social in Nineteenth–Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Joyeux-Prunel, Béatrice, 'Provincializing Paris. The Center-Periphery Narrative of Modern Art in Light of Qualitative and Transnational Approaches', in: *Artl@s Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (2019), p. 40–64.

Joyeux-Prunel, Béatrice, *Les avant-gardes artistiques 1918–1945. Une histoire transnationale* (Paris: Gallimard 2017).

Joyner, C.W., *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999).

Kandinsky, Wassily, 'On the Spiritual in Art', in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Virgo (eds.), *Kandinsky. Complete Writings on Art* (New York: Da Capo Press 1994), p. 120–219.

Karl, Frederick, *William Faulkner: American Writer: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 1989).

Kaster, Richard, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Kawin, Bruce, *Faulkner and Film* (Ungar, New York 1977).

Kawin, Bruce, *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

Kaye, Sidney and Harvey B. Baag, 'Study of Death due to combined Action of Alcohol and Paraldehyde in Man', *Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology* 6, no. 3 (1964): p. 316–320.

Kearns Goodwin, Doris, *Lyndon Johnson and the American dream* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976).

Kearns Goodwin, Doris, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*: *An American Saga* (New York: Knopf [après 1986 Simon & Schuster], 1973).

Kendall, Joshua, 'Robert Caro's Blind Spot', *Slate* 22 April, 2019, https://slate.com/culture/2019/04/lyndon-johnson-robert-caro-affairs-misogyny.html.

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998).

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler, 1936–1945: Nemesis* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).

Kershaw, Ian, 'Biography and the Historian: Opportunities and Constraints', in Volker Berghahn and Simone Lässig (eds.), *Biography between Structure and Agency. Central European Lives in International Historiography*, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 27–39.

Kippen, Rebecca, "Incorrect, loose and coarse Terms': Classifying Nineteenth-century English-language Causes of Death for Modern Use. An Example using Tasmanian Data', *Journal of Population Research* 28, no. 4 (2011), p. 267–291.

Kisters, Sandra, *The Lure of the Biographical. On the* (*self-*)*representation of modern artists* (Amsterdam: Valiz 2017).

Kleijngeld, A.M.P., *Gemobiliseerde militairen in Tilburg tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact, 1983).

Klein, Christian (ed.), *Handbuch Biographie: Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009).

Kracauer, Siegfried, *History: The last things before the last*, completed by Paul Oskar Kristeller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Kukkonen, Karin, 'Plot', in: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn, et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University): http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/plot.

Kumar, Vinay, Abul Abbas et al., *Robbins and Cotran Pathological Basis of Disease* (Philadelphia: Saunders Elsevier, 2010).

LaCapra, Dominick, 'Chartier, Darnton, and the Great Symbol Massacre', in: *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988), p. 95–112.

Lacouture, Jean, 'L'histoire immédiate', in: Jacques le Goff, Roger Chartier & Jacques Revel (eds.), *La nouvelle histoire*, p. 270–293.

Langer, Phil C. und Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad, 'Psychologie und Biographieforschung', in: *Handbuch Biographieforschung*, ed. by Helma Lutz, Martina Schiebel, Elisabeth Tuider (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018).

Lässig, Simone, 'Introduction', in: Volker Berghahn and Simone Lässig (eds.), *Biography between Structure and Agency. Central European Lives in International Historiography*, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

Le Goff, Jacques, and Pierre Nora (eds.), *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

Le Goff, Jacques, Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel (eds.), *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris: CEPL, 1978) (Les encyclopédies du savoir moderne).

Le Goff, Jacques, *Saint Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

Lee, Hermione, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Lee, Hermione, 'Biomythographers: Rewriting the Lives of Virginia Woolf', in: *Essays in Criticism*, XVLI, no. 2 (1996), p. 95–114.

Leighten, Patricia, *The liberation of painting. Modernism and anarchism in avant-guerre Paris* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Levi, Albert William, 'Book review, The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility', *Ethics* 54(1944)2, p. 152–153.

Levi, Giovanni, 'Les usages de la biographie', *Annales ESC*, XLIV (1989) 6, p. 1325–1336.

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

Levi, Giovanni, 'The Uses of Biography', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 61–74.

Lewis, Thomas S.W., 'Combining 'The Advantages of Fact and Fiction': Virginia Woolf's Biographies of Vita Sackville-West, Flush and Roger Fry', in: Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb (eds.), *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays* (Troy, New York: The Whiston Publishing Company, 1983).

Leys, Ruth, 'Turn to Affect. A Critique', in: *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2011): p. 434–472.

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

Lindsay, Lisa and John Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2014).

Link, Arthur S. et al. (eds.), *The papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966–1994).

Link, Arthur S., 'Woodrow Wilson: the Philosophy, methods and impact of leadership', in: Arthur P. Dudden (ed.), *Woodrow Wilson and the World of Today* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1957), p. 1–21.

Link, Arthur S., 'A Decade of Biographical Contributions to Recent American History', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 34(1934), p. 637–652.

Linthorst, Gerdin, 'Film in Nederland' in: *Ons Erfdeel* 32 (1989), p. 513–520.

Lissitzky, El, *Proun und Wolkenbügel. Schriften, Briefe, Dokumente*, eds. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers and Jen Lissitzky (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1977).

Lissitzky-Küppers, Sophie (ed.), *El Lissitzky. Maler, Architekt, Typograf, Fotograf. Erinnerungen, Briefe, Schriften* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1992).

Lista, Giovanni, *De Chirico et l'avant-garde* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1983).
Lloyd, Christopher, *The Structures of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
Lodge, David, *Changing Places* (Eastbourne: Gardners Books Ltd, 1975).
Lodge, David, *Small World* (Eastbourne: Gardners Books Ltd, 1984).
Lodge, David, *Nice Work* (Eastbourne: Gardners Books Ltd, 1988).
Looper, Michael de, 'Death Registration and Mortality Trends in Australia 1856–1906' (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2014).
López-Muñoz, Francisco, Ronaldo Ucha-Udabe, and Cecilio Alamo. 'The History of Barbiturates a Century after their Clinical Introduction', in: *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 1(2005)4, p. 329–343.
Loriga, Sabina, 'La biographie comme problème'; Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro–analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard / Hautes Etudes, 1996), p. 209–231.
Loriga, Sabina, 'Ecriture biographique et écriture d l'histoire aux XIXe et XXe siècles', in: *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, XXII (2010) 45, p. 47–71.
Loriga, Sabina, *Le petit x. De la biographie à l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 2010).
Loriga, Sabina, 'The Plurality of the Past', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 31–41.
Loriga, Sabina, 'The role of the individual in history: Biographical and historical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, *Theoretical discussions of biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 75–93.
Lucas, Duncan A., *Affect Theory, Genre, and the Example of Tragedy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
Lurie, Peter and Ann J. Abadie (eds.), *Faulkner and Film* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014).
Luykx, Paul, *Andere katholieken. Opstellen over Nederlandse katholieken in de twintigste eeuw* (Nijmegen: SUN, 2000).
Lynn, Jonathan and Antony Jay, *The Complete Yes Minister* (London: BBC Books, 1989).
Lyon, Martyn, *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994).
Macfarlane, Alan, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin. A Seventeenth Century Clergyman* (New York: Norton & Company, 1970).
Mackay, Ruth, *The Baker Who Pretended to be King of Portugal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).
MacMillan, Margaret, *History's People: Personalities and the Past* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company 2015).
MacRaild, Donald M. and Avram Taylor, 'Social Structure and Human Agency in Historical Explanation', in *Social Theory and Social History* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 80–117.

Maertz, Gregory, 'Carlyle's Critique of Goethe: Literature and the Cult of Personality', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 29(1996), p. 205–226.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi and Davíð Ólafsson, 'Barefoot Historians: Education in Iceland in the Modern Period,' in *Writing Peasants. Studies on Peasant Literacy in Early Modern Northern Europe*, ed. Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt and Bjørn Poulsen (Århus: Landbohistorisk Selskab, 2002), 175–209.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, '*The Singularization of History*: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge', in: *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (2003), p. 701–735.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, *Wasteland with words. A social history of Iceland* (London: Reaktion, 2010).

Magnússon Sigurður Gylfi and Davíð Ólafsson, 'Minor knowledge. Microhistory, Scribal Communities, and the Importance of Institutional Structures', in: *Quaderni storici* 47(2012)140, p. 495–524.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, 'Far-reaching Microhistory: the use of microhistorical perspective in a globalized world', in: *Rethinking History* 21(2017)3, p. 312–341.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, 'A 'new wave' of microhistory? Or: It's the same old story – a fight for love and glory', in: *Quaderni Storici* 52 (2017) p. 560–563.

Magnússon. Sigurður Gylfi, 'The Life Is Never Over: Biography as a Microhistorical Approach', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 42–52.

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory. Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2017).

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory. A Life Story of a Destitute Pauper Poet in the 19th Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

Mah, Harold, 'Suppressing the Text: The Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre', in: *History Workshop Journal* 31 (Spring 1991), p. 1–20.

Malcolm, Janet, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Malcolm, Janet, 'Double Trouble', in *The Guardian*, November 17, 2007.

Malcolm, Janet, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

Man, Paul de, *The Fear of Theory. Foreword by Wlad Godzich* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002 (1986)).

Mann, Thomas, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1918).

Mann, Thomas, *Reflections of a Non-Political Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983).

Matt, Susan J., 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out', in: *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1, p. 117–124.

McCabe, Colin, 'A Tale of Two Theories', in: *The New Statesman*, 26 September 2011.

McCarthy, Todd, *Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood* (New York: Grove Press, 2000).

McLaren, Angus, *A Prescription for Murder. The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

McTaggart, Lynne, *Kathleen Kennedy: Her Life and Times* (New York: Dial Press, 1983).

Mehan, G. Tracy, 'A Golden Age of Biography', in: *The American Spectator*, March 16, 2007.

Melders, Robert, *Jozef Peeters (1895–1960)* (Antwerp and Amsterdam: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1978).

Merwick, Donna, *Death of a Notary: Conquest and change in colonial New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Meyers, Jeffrey, *The enemy. A biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

Miller, Ian, *A History of Force Feeding: Hunger Strikes, Prisons and Medical Ethics, 1909–1974* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Miller, Joseph, 'A Historical Appreciation of the Biographical Turn', in: Lisa Lindsay and John Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2014), p. 9–47.

Minnow-Pinkey, Makiko, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987).

Minter, David, *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

Mitchell, Piers D., 'Retrospective Diagnosis and the Use of historical Texts for investigating Disease in the Past', *International Journal of Paleopathology* 1, no. 2 (2011), p. 81–88.

Molnár, András (ed.), *Zala megye archontológiája 1138–2000* (Zalaegerszeg: Zala Megyei Levéltár, 2000).

Monk, Ray, 'Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', in: *Poetics Today* 28, no. 3 (2007), p. 528–570.

Morinck, Gerard, *Vita Hadriani Sexti Pontificis Maximi* (Leuven: Ex Officina Rutgeri Rescij, 1536).

Morris, Benny, 'Making History', *Tablet Magazine* [online], July 26, 2010, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/making-history.

Morrison, Mark S., *The public face of modernism. Little magazines, audiences, and reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

Morrow, John, *Thomas Carlyle* (London and New York: Hambledon-Continuum, 2006).

Moulin, Joanny, 'Introduction – Towards Biography Theory', in: *Cercles*, 2015, 35.

Mourino, M. R., 'From Thales to Lauterbur, or from the Lodestone to MR Imaging: Magnetism and Medicine', *Radiology* 180, no. 3 (1991), p. 593–612.

Munro, Doug, review of Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/1253.

Munslow, Alun, 'History and Biography: An Editorial Comment', in: *Rethinking History*, VII, 2003, 1, p. 1–11.

Munslow, Alun, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 2006, 2nd edition).

Munslow, Alun, *Narrative and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan [etc.], 2007).

Naftali, Tim, 'Ronald Reagan's Long-Hidden Racist Conversation With Richard Nixon', *The Atlantic* 30 July 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/ronald-reagans-racist-conversation-richard-nixon/595102.

Neumann, Franz Alun, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London, Gollancz, 1942).

Nicolson, Harold, *The Development of English Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927).

Noiriel, Gérard, *Sur le 'crise' de l'histoire* (Paris: Belin, 1996), p. 126–144.

Nora, Pierre, 'Le retour de l'événement', in: Jacques le Goff & Pierre Nora (eds.), *Faire de l'histoire. vol. 1. Nouveaux problèmes*, p. 210–228.

Norwich, John Julius, *The Popes. A History* (London, Vintage 2011).

Oates, Stephen B., *William Faulkner: The Man and the Artist* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987).

Olthof, Jelte and Maarten Zwiers (eds.), Profiles in Power. Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020).

Oman, Carola, *Napoleon at the Channel* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1942).

Ottevanger, Alied (ed.), *'De Stijl overal absolute leiding' De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Doesburg en Antony Kok* (Bussum: Thoth, 2008).

Ottevanger, Alied, *De Stijl in Tilburg. Over de vriendschap tussen Theo van Doesburg en Antony Kok* (Amsterdam: Stokerkade, 2007).

Paenhuysen, An, *De Nieuwe Wereld. Wonderjaren van de Belgische avant-garde (1918–1939)* (Amsterdam and Antwerp: Meulenhoff and Manteau 2010).

Paley, Ruth, 'Archives and records in a post-truth world', https://networks.h-net.org/node/16749/discussions/5600011/archives-and-records-post-truth-world.

Pálsson, Stefán, 'Tár, bros og töfraskór', TMM 3(2011), p. 136–140.

Palty, Elías, 'The 'Return of the Subject' as a Historico-Intellectual Problem', in: *History and Theory*, XLIII, 2004, 1, p. 57–82.

Parini, Jay, *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner* (New York: Harper, 2004).

Passeron, Jean-Claude, 'Biographies, flux, itinéraires, trajectoires', in: *Revue française de Sociologie* XXXI (1990), no. 1, p. 3–22.

Passeron, Jean-Claude, *Le raisonnement sociologique. L'espace non-poppérien du raisonnement naturel* (Paris: Nathan, 1991).

Passeron, Jean-Claude, *Sociological Reasoning: A Non-Popperian Space of Argumentation*, translated by Rachel Gomme (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2013).

Passeron, Jean-Claude and Jacques Revel (eds.), *Penser par cas* (Paris: Editions de L'EHESS, 2005).

Pastor, Ludwig Freiherr, *Geschichte der Päpste im Zeitalter der Renaissance und der Glaubenspaltung*, volume II: *Adrian VI. Und Klemens VII*, book II: *Adrian VI., der letste deutsche Papst* (*1522–1523*).

Peeters, Evert, Leen van Molle and Kaat Wils, 'Introduction. Modern Asceticism: A Historical Exploration' in Peeters, van Molle and Wils (eds.), *Beyond Pleasure. Cultures of Modern Asceticism* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2011), p. 1–18.

Peltonen, Matti, 'What is micro in microhistory?', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 105–118.

Pernau, Margrit, 'Mapping Emotions, Constructing Feelings. Delhi in 1840s', in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58 (2015), p. 634–667.

Petrie, Dennis W., 'Biographical Criticism', in: Charles A. Peek and Robert W. Hamblin (eds.), *A Companion to Faulkner Studies* (High Wycombe: Greenwood Press, 2004).

Petrie, Dennis W., *Ultimately Fiction: Design in Modern American Literary Biography* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1981).

Plamper, Jan, 'The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,' in: *History and Theory*, 49 (May 2010), p. 237–265.

Plamper, Jan, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Plas, Michel van der, *Daarom, mijnheer, noem ik mij katholiek. Biografie van Anton van Duinkerken* (Amsterdam/Tielt: Anthos/Lannoo, 2000).

Plekhanov, G.V., *The Role of the Individual in History* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961, fp. 1898).

Plutarch, 'Life of Alexander,' in John Dryden, *Plutarch's Lives,* vol. 4 (London: 1683–1686).

Polak, Sara, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt as an Architect of Public History', in: Jelte Olthof and Maarten Zwiers (eds.), *Profiles in Power. Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020), p. 81–95.

Pomata, Gianna, 'Close-Ups and Long Shots: Combining Particular and General in Writing the Histories of Women and Men', in: Hans Medick and Anne-Charlott Trepp (eds.), *Geschlechtergeschichte und Allgemeine Geschichte. Herausforderungen und Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), p. 99–124.

Popkin, Jeremy D., *History, Historians, & Autobiography* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Porter, Carolyn, *William Faulkner: Lives and Legacies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Rabaté, Jean-Michel, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

Rabaté, Jean-Michel, *1913. The cradle of modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

Railey, Kevin, *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999).

Rainey, Lawrence, *Institutions of modernism. Literary elites and public culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Rampton, David, *William Faulkner: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Ransel, David L., *A Russian Merchant's Tale. The Life and Adventures of Ivan Alekseevich Tolchënov, Based on His Diary* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

Rastrick, Ólafur and Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (eds.), *Menningararfur á Íslandi. Greining og gagnrýni* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2015).

Rattner Gelbart, Nina, *The King's Midwife: A history and mystery of Madame du Coudray* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

Reay, Burry, *Watching Hannah. Sexuality, horror and bodily de-formation in Victorian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).

Reddy, William M., 'Emotional Styles and Modern Forms of Life', in Nicole C. Karafyllis and Gotlind Ulshöfer (eds.), *Sexualized Brains. Scientific Modeling of Emotional Intelligence from a Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge/London: Bradford Book, The MIT Press, 2008), p. 81–100.

Reddy, William M., *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Rees-Mogg, William, *Memoirs* (London: HarperPress, 2011).

Renders, Hans and Paul Arnoldussen, 'Toen kwam Colijn binnen. Kaart Abessinië!', in: idem, *Jong in de jaren dertig. Interviews* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2003, first edition: de Prom, Baarn 1999) p. 141–148.

Renders, Hans, 'Vergruisde zuilen. In katholieke kringen', in: *Vrij Nederland*, March 31, 2001.

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

Renders, Hans, 'Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. De biografie in Limburg', in: Rob Bindels & Ben van Melick (eds.), *Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. Dag van de biografie* (Maastricht: Huis voor de Kunsten Limburg, 2007).

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, no. 3 (2008), p. 98–123.

Renders, Hans, 'The Limits of Representativeness', in: Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), p. 129–138.

Renders, Hans, 'Exceptions that Prove the Rule: Biography, Microhistory, and Marginals in Dutch Cities', in: Binne de Haan and Konstantin Mierau (eds.), *Microhistory and the Picaresque novel: a first exploration into commensurable perspectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

Renders, Hans and Binne de Haan (eds.), *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014).

Renders, Hans and Sjoerd van Faassen, 'Biographies as multipliers: The First World War as turning point in the lives of modern artists', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn. Lives in history* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 91–103.

Renders, Hans, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, *The Biographical Turn. Lives in History* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2017).

Renders, Hans and Nigel Hamilton, *Het ABC van de Biografie* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2018).

Renders, Hans, 'L'éthique et le Vatican. Le Biographie sous serment professionnel', in: Joanny Moulin, Nguyen Phuong Ngoc et Yannick Gouchan (eds.), *La Vérité d'une vie. Études sur la veridiction en biographie* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019), p. 35–44.

Renders, Hans and David Veltman, *Different Lives. Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2020).

Retford, Kate, 'Philippe Ariès's "Discovery of Childhood": Imagery and Historical Evidence', *Continuity and Change* 31, no. 3, p. 391–418.

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

Righart, Hans, *De katholieke zuil in Europa. Een vergelijkend onderzoek naar het ontstaan van verzuiling in Oostenrijk, Zwitserland, België en Nederland* (Meppel: Boom, 1986).

Robbins, Ben, 'The Pragmatic Modernist: William Faulkner's Craft and Hollywood's Networks of Production', in: *Journal of Screenwriting* 5, no. 2 (2014), p. 239–257.

Roberts, Phillip, 'Determining the Meaning behind Historical Disease Terminology through an Examination of Patterns of Terminology Used in the Mortality Statistics of Victoria, 1853–1900', *Health and History* 10, no. 1 (2008), p. 63–87.

Roberts, Philip, 'Diagnosis as an Artefact: A Case Study to determine the Meaning of 'Ague' and 'Remittent Fever' in Nineteenth Century Victoria', *Artefact* 37 (2014), p. 3–17.

Robertson, C. L., 'Remarks on the Use of Digitalis in the Treatment of Insanity', *British Medical Journal*, 2, no. 144 (3 October, 1863), p. 364–367.

Röhl, John C.G., *Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser's Early Life, 1859–1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Röhl, John C.G., *William II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Röhl, John C.G., *William II: Into the Abyss of War and Exile, 1900–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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

Rollyson, Carl, *Confessions of a Serial Biographer* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016).

Rollyson, Carl, 'Liberation From Low Dark Space: Biography beside and beyond the academy', in: Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (eds.), *The Biographical Turn* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 176–185.

Rollyson, Carl, *The Life of William Faulkner, Volume 2: This Alarming Paradox, 1935–1962* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming fall 2020).

Romein, Jan, *De Biografie* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1951).

Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London & Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1984).

Rosenberg, Philip, *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 191–193.

Rosenthal, Michael, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

Rosenwein, Barbara H., *'Review Essay*: Worrying about Emotions in History,' *American Historical Review*, 107 (June 2002), p. 821–845.

Rosenwein, Barbara H., *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Roth, David T., 'Chemical Restraint at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane in Sydney, New South Wales, 1877–1920', *Health and History* 20, no. 1 (August 2018), p. 1–27.

Roth, David T., 'Life, Death and Deliverance at Callan Park Hospital for the Insane, 1877 to 1923' (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, Canberra).

Roy Ladurie. Emmanuel Le, *Montaillou. The Promised Land of Error*, translated by Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

Russell Bentley, Eric, 'Modern Hero-Worship: Notes on Carlyle, Nietzsche, and Stefan George', *The Sewanee Review* 52(1944)3, p. 441–456.

Ryazanskaya, S. (ed.), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965).

Sadowsky, Jonathan, *Electroconvulsive Therapy in America: The Anatomy of a Medical Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

Salemink, Theo, "Huiver voor ontaarding.' Katholieken en avant-garde', in: Frank Bosman and Theo Salemink (eds.), *Avant-garde en religie. Over het spirituele in de moderne kunst 1905–1955* (Utrecht: Van Gruting 2009), p. 289–333.

Sanders, Mathijs, *Het spiegelend venster: katholieken in de Nederlandse literatuur, 1870–1940* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2002).

Sardica, José Miguel, 'The content and form of 'conventional' historical biography', in: *Rethinking History*, XVII, 2013, 3, p. 383–400.

Saunders, Max, *Self impression. Life-writing, autobiographiction, and the forms of modern literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Scheer, Monique, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', in: *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012), p. 193–220.

Schnell, Rüdiger, *Histories of Emotions. Modern – Premodern* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021).

Schuyt, Kees and Ed Taverne; with the collaboration of Sandra van Voorst, Klaas van Berkel, Hans van Maanen, Frans Ruiter and Wilma Süto, *1950. Prosperity and welfare* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), translated from the Dutch original by the Language Centre, University of Groningen.

Schwitters, Kurt, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt. Briefe aus fünf Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nüdel (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1974).

Seigel, Jules Paul (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle. The Critical Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1971).

Sensibar, Judith L., *Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped His Art: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Servellón, Sergio, with Anne Adriaens-Pannier, *The oeuvre of Felix de Boeck in drawings* (Wijnegem: Pandora Publishers etc., 2012).

Sewell, Rob, 'The Decisive Role of the Individual in History', in: *In Defence of Marxism* (2005), https://www.marxist.com/about-us.htm.

Shapiro, Michael, 'Roger Fry: A Biography', n.d., modernism.courseresource.yale.edu/2017/07/28/roger-fry-a-biography/.

Shaw, William H., 'Plekhanov on the Role of the Individual in History', *Studies in Soviet Thought* 35(1988)3, p. 247–265.

Sidney, George, 'Faulkner in Hollywood: Study of His Career as a Scenarist' (unpublished thesis, University of New Mexico, 1959).

Slot, Pim, 'Janus van Domburg (1895–1985). Filmpaus in Nederland', in: *Jaarboek mediageschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Stichting Beheer IISG/Stichting Mediageschiedenis, 1995), p. 98–111.

Smet, Johan de, 'Voorbij de mimesis: wegen naar een autonome kunst in Belgie (1917–1930)', in De Smet (ed.), *Modernisme. Belgische abstracte kunst en Europa*, ed. (Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 2013), p. 63–148.

Smith, Douglas, *The Pearl. A True Tale of Forbidden Love in Catherine the Great's Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Smith, Jay M., *Monsters of the Gévaudan. The Making of a Beast* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

Söhn, Gerhart, *Literaten hinter Masken. Eine Betrachtung über das Pseudonym in der Literatur* (Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1974).

Solomon, Stefan, *William Faulkner in Hollywood: Screenwriting for the Studios* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

Sorensen, David R. and Brent E. Kinser (eds.), *Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (University of California Press, 1993).

Sorensen, David R., 'Selective Affinities: Carlyle, Goethe and the French Revolution', in: *Carlyle Studies Annual* 16(1996), p. 61–71.

Spencer, Herbert, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912, f.p. 1873).

Squire, J.C. (ed.), *If or History Rewritten* (New York: The Viking Press, 1931).

Squire, J.C. (ed.), *If it happened otherwise: lapses into imaginary history* (London: Longmans, 1932).

Stainbrook, Edward, 'The Use of Electricity in Psychiatric Treatment during the Nineteenth Century', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 22 (1948), p. 156–177.

Stanfield, James Field, *An Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography* (Sunderland 1813).

Stearns, Peter N. and Carol Z., 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', in: *The American Historical Review*, 90, no. 4 (1985), p. 813–836.

Stearns, Peter N. *American Cool. Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994).

Stedman, Gesa, *Stemming the Torrent. Expression and Control in Victorian Discourse on Emotions, 1830–1872* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2002).

Steinke, Ronen, *Fritz Bauer oder Auschwitz vor Gericht* (Munich: Piper, 2018).

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

Stone, Donald, 'Goethe and the Victorians', *Carlyle Annual* 13(1992–1993), p. 17–34.

Strachey, Lytton, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1918).

Strachey, Lytton, *Biographical essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948).

Summers, Anthony, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 1993).

Szijártó, István M., 'The paths of microhistory', in: *Quaderni storici* 53 (2018) 917–928.

Tapp, E.J., 'The Role of the Individual in history', in: *The Australian Quarterly* 30(1958)1, p. 51–64.

Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Terpastra, Nicholas, *Lost Girls. Sex and Death in Renaissance Florence* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

Throntveit, Trygve, 'William James's Ethical Republic', in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72(2011)2, p. 255–277.

Tillyard, Stella, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah Lennox, 1740–1832* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994).

Tomalin, Claire, *A Life of My Own* (New York, Penguin Press, 2019).

Tomes, Nancy, *A Generous Confidence. Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-keeping, 1840–1883*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Tomkins, Silvan, 'Script Theory. Differential Magnification of Affects', in: H.E. Howe and R.A. Dienstbier (eds.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 201–236, reprinted in Virginia Demos (ed.) *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Tomkins, Silvan, 'Inverse Archaeology: Facial Affect and the Interfaces of Scripts Within and Between Persons', in Virginia Demos (ed.), *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 284–290.

Treia, D.J. and Rodger L. Tarr, *The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997).

Tromp, Will and J.A. Dautzenberg, *Kok van De Stijl. Spoorwegbeambte te Tilburg* (Oosterbeek: Bosbespers, 1989).

Trotsky, Leon, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman, 3 vols. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009, f.p. 1930).

Troy, Nancy J., *The afterlife of Piet Mondrian* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Troyat, Henri, *Le Marchand de Masques: roman* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

Tuijn, Marguerite, *Mon cher ami... Lieber Does... Theo van Doesburg en de praktijk van de internationale avant-garde*, unpublished thesis University of Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 2003).

Tuke, D. Hack, *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine. Giving the Definition, Etymology and Synonyms of the Terms used in Medical Psychology with the Symptoms, Treatment and Pathology of Insanity and the Law of Lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland*. (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1892).

Tyssens, Jeffrey, 'Fraternity and biography', in: *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, VI(2016) 1, p. 5–20.

Urgo, Joseph, *Faulkner's Apocrypha* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 1989).

Vargas Llosa, Mario, *A Fish in the Water. A Memoir*. Transl. by Helen Lane (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).

Verweij, Michel, *Adrianus VI (1459–1523). De tragische paus uit de Nederlanden* (Antwerpen and Apeldoorn: Garant, 2011).

Vries, Jan de (ed.), *Nederland 1913. Een reconstructie van het culturele leven* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1988).

Walsh, Dorothy, 'Philosophical Implications of the Historical Enterprise', in: *Journal of Philosophy* 34(1937)3, p. 57–64.

Washton Long, Rose-Carol, 'Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction. Kandinsky's Art of the Future', in: *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (1987), p. 38–45.

Watson, James G., *Thinking of Home: William Faulkner's Letters to his Mother and Father, 1918–1925* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

Weber, Max, 'Critical studies in the logic of the cultural studies' (1906) in Edith Hanke et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Weinstein, Philip, *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Wenderski, Michał, *Cultural Mobility in the Interwar Avant-Garde Art Network. Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands* (New York and London: Routledge 2019).

Werkman, Hans, *De wereld van Willem de Mérode* (Soesterberg 2011; first edition Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1983).

Wilder, Thornton, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927).

Williams, Elizabeth A., 'Gags, Funnels and Tubes: Forced Feeding of the Insane and of Suffragettes', *Endeavour* 32, no. 4 (2008), p. 134–140.

Williamson, Joel, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Wilson, Clyde N. (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Historians* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1983).

Winock, Michel, *Madame de Stael* (Paris: Fayard, 2010).

Wittenberg, Judith, *Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 3rd printing, 1967, original 1953).

Woods, Frederick Adams, *The influence of Monarchs* (London: Macmillan, 1913).

Woolf, Virginia, *Books and Portraits*, ed. Mary Lyon (London: Triad Grafton, 1979).

Woolf, Virginia, *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981).

Woolf, Virginia, *Collected Essays: Volume IV* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967).

Woolf, Virginia, *The Common Reader*, Second Series (Adelaide: eBooks@Adelaide, 2004).

Woolf, Virginia, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1925–1930*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982).

Woolf, Virginia, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV: 1931–1935*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1982).

Woolf, Virginia, *Granite and Rainbow* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958).

Woolf, Virginia, 'How Should One Read a Book?', in: *Yale Review*, 89, no. 1 (2001), p. 41–52.

Woolf, Virginia, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1923–1928*, eds. Nigel Nicholon and Joanna Trautmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).

Woolf, Virginia, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume IV: 1929–1931*, eds. Nigel Nicholon and Joanna Trautmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

Woolf, Virginia, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932–1935*, eds. Nigel Nicholon and Joanna Trautmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

Woolf, Virginia, *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead*, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936–1941*, eds. Nigel Nicholon and Joanna Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980).

Woolf, Virginia, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: Grafton Books, 1989).

Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own*, (London: Grafton Books, 1977).

Woolf, Virginia, *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Persephone Books, 2012).

Wulf, Andrea, *The invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's new world* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).

Zagorin, Perez, 'History, the Referent, and Narrative: Reflexions on Postmodernism Now', in: *History and Theory*, XLVIII, 1999, 1, p. 1–24.

Zagorin, Perez, 'Rejoinder to a Postmodernist', in: *History and Theory*, XLIX, 2000, 2, p. 201–209.

Zamoyski, Adam, *1812: Napoleon's fatal march on Moscow* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

Zemon Davis, Natalie, 'On The Lame', in *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), p. 572–603.

Zemon Davis, Natalie, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Zemon Davis, Natalie, *Trickster Travels: In Search of Leo Africanus. A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

Zervas, Josef, *A Manual for the Treatment of Diseases by Electricity employing the Faradic Current* (Jersey City, New Jersey: F. G. Otto & Sons, 1888).

Index

Aafjes, Bertus 234
Abadie, Ann J. 168
Abbas, Abul 133
Ackroyd, Peter 230
Adriaens-Pannier, Anne 143, 145
Adrian VI (pope) 115–118
Agnarsdóttir, Anna 2
Ahmad, Aisha-Nusrat 56
Alamo, Cecilio 132
Alexander III (king of Macedon) 55–56
Alexander IV (Rodrigo de Borgia, pope) 117
Alighieri, Dante 77
Allen, Richard 16
Al-Malik, Abd (sultan of Morocco) 95
Amato, Joseph A. 198
Amigoni, David 76
Ana of Austria (nun) 96–97
Andrews, Dana X
Annunzio, Gabriele d' 157
Anrep, Helen 183
Apollinaire, Guillaume (ps. of W.A.W.A. Kostrowicki) 158
Arc, Jeanne d' 107
Archimedes (scientist) 19
Archipenko, Alexander 155
Arcy, Martin d' 127–132, 138
Aretino, Pietro 116
Aristotle 114
Arnold, Thomas 178
Arnoldussen, Paul 236
Arp, Hans 159
Arp, Sophie 159
Arthur, Chester A. 119
Arthur, Richard 132
Asselbergs, W.J.M.A. 112
Assouline, Pierre 228–230
Atkinson, Juliette 79
Atkinson, Nancy VIII
Atlas, James 35, 38–39
Augustus, Philip 200
Augustus (emperor) 82
Aurell, Jaume 74

Baag, Harvey B. 132
Bacon, Lloyd F. 106
Bacskai, Beáta 224
Baernstein, P. Renée 94
Baets, Antoon de 119
Bair, Deirdre 35
Balk, Hildelies 157
Bank, Jan 231
Barclay, Katie 57, 68
Barr, Alfred 149
Barr, Caroline 168
Barret, William E. 169
Barrett Browning, Elizabeth 19, 176, 181–182
Barrie, James 236
Barthes, Roland 32, 41, 45
Bartkevicius, Jocelyn 185
Bauer, Fritz 48
Baxter, J. 40
Beales, Derek 86
Beckett, Samuel 229
Bell, Clive 186
Bell, Julian 186
Bell, Quintin 182, 184
Bell, Vanessa 184, 187
Belletto, Camilla 220
Benedict III (pope) 120
Berenson, Edward 204
Berg, Hubert van den 147, 149
Berghahn, Volker 25–27, 29, 141
Berkel, Klaas van 231
Berlin, Isaiah 85
Berni, Francesco 116
Bertrande. *See* Guerre, Pierre
Beveridge, Albert 85
Biess, Frank 67
Bindels, Rob 234
Bix, Herbert 9
Bjarnason, Gunnar Þór 8
Bleikasten, André 164, 167
Bliss, Michael 7
Bloch, Marc 43, 229
Blom, Hans 104, 232
Blom, Philipp 159
Blondell, Joan 105
Blotner, Joseph 164–165, 167, 175
Bloy, Léon 112
Boddice, Rob 60–61

Boeck, Felix de xi, 18, 142–143, 145–146, 148, 150–152
Boef, August-Hans den 157
Boeyens, Adriaan Florensz. *See* Adrian vi (pope)
Bogart, Humphrey 170–171
Bondanella, Julia Conaway 116
Bongiorno, Frank 139
Bonsergent, Jacques 229
Bonset, I.K. (ps. of Theo van Doesburg) 161
Borsten, Orin 168–169
Bosman, Frank 145
Bossche, Chris R. Vanden 78
Boswell, James 177, 187
Bourdieu, Pierre 31, 40–41, 45–47, 51–53, 63–64
Bourke, Joanna 69
Boyer, Paul 197–198
Braak, Menno ter 105
Braembussche, Antoon van den 110
Branch, E. 197
Brandtzaeg, Kari J. 147
Braudel, Fernand 43, 49, 86, 189
Braun, Marianne 231
Bray, Barbara 93
Bremmer, H.P. 157
Brennan, Walter x, 171
Brewer, John 216
Brien, John O' 146
Bright, John 45
Broadwell, Paula 121
Brodsky, Louis Daniel 174
Brom, Gerard 235
Brown, Irene Quenzler 198
Brown, Richard D. 198, 217
Browning, Robert 181–182
Bru, Sacha 159
Bürger, Peter 145–146
Burke, Peter 60, 67, 140, 192, 237
Burns, Robert 77
Burns, Sallie 172
Bush, Stephen S. 80
Butterfield, Herbert 83, 85, 87
Buuren, Maarten van 231

Cabrera, Miguel A. 199
Caesar, Julius 82, 120
Cagney, James 105
Caillaux, Henriette 204
Caine, Barbara 88
Calvet, Louis-Jean 41
Campert, Jan ix
Carl, Frederick 164, 166
Carlyle, Thomas 23, 31, 75–80, 83, 86–88
Caro, Robert 4, 5, 23, 35, 53, 72–73, 75–76
Carpenter Wilde, Meta 168–169
Carr, E.H. 38, 87
Carroll, Lewis (ps. of Charles Dodgson) 236
Cassiman, Bart 143, 150
Catherine (the Great) 202
Cawthon, David 81
Cendrars, Blaise (ps. of F.L. Sauser) 229
Chadeau, Emmanuel 119
Chamberedon, Jean-Claude 51
Charle, Cristoph 46
Charles v (emperor) 117
Charmley, John 27
Chartier, Roger 43–44
Chirico, Giorgio De 155
Churchill, Suzanne W. 157
Churchill, Winston 6, 84
Cipolla, Carlo M. 93
Clark, Manning 4
Clark, Stuart 86
Clemens vii (Giulio de' Medici, pope) 115–117
Clinton, Bill vii
Cobb, Lee J. 171
Cohen, Patricia Cline 198, 217
Colijn, Hendrikus 236
Collins, Carvel 167
Collins, Roger 116
Cook, Alexendra Parma 98
Cook, Noble David 98
Cooley, Elizabeth 184–185
Coomb, Helen 184
Copernicus, Nicolaus 115
Coras, Jean de 213
Corbin, Alain 86
Coudray, Angélique du 204
Courthope, Walter 129–130
Coutau-Bégarie, Hervé 48–49
Craeybeckx, Jan 43
Craigie, Jill x
Cream, Thomas Neill 91–92, 204
Cromwell, Oliver 77, 82

Crozier-De Rosa, Sharon 57, 68
Curie, Marie x
Curnutt, Kirk 164
Cusset, François 41

Daddow, Oliver 45
Dalleck, Robert 9
Dam, Peter van 111
Damasio, Antonio 57
Darnton, Robert 93, 122, 205, 207
Dautzenberg, J.A. 155
Decaux, Alain 49
Delaunay, Robert 162
Deleuze, Gilles 41
DeMille, Cecil B. 108
Demos, John P. 197–198
Demos, Virginia 65
Derouet, Christian 157
Derrida, Jacques 26, 41
Deth, Ron van 136
Deutsch, Loràn t 229–230
DiBattista, Maria 180
Dibbets, Karel H.F.M. 105
Dickinson, Emily x
Dickinson, Goldsworthy Lowes 178
Dienstbier, R.A. 65
Dilthey, Wilhelm 22, 31, 46, 75
DiMaio, V.J.M. 132
Dixon, Thomas 61
Dodgson, Charles. *See* Carroll, Lewis
Dodman, Thomas 56
Doesburg, Nelly van (Nelly van Moorsel) 154, 161
Doesburg, Theo van (ps. of C.E.M. Küpper) x, 19, 143, 147, 153–163
Domburg, Adrianus Johannes van ix, 18, 104–106, 109
Doolaard, A. den (ps. of C.J.G. Spoelstra) 235
Dosse, François 45–47, 49–50
Dostoevsky, Fyodor 182
Draaisma, Douwe 231
Dreyer, Carl 107
Duby, George 200
Ducke, Karl-Heinz 115
Dudden, Arthur P. 85
Duinkerken, Anton van (ps. of W.J.M.A. Asselbergs) 112, 233
Dummitt, Christopher 9
Dunn, Waldo H. 74
Durand, Pascal 148
Dusar, Lutgart 143

Eagleton, Terry 42
Edel, Leon 73, 184
Edison, Thomas 105
Eesteren, Cornelis van 153–154, 159
Eiríksson, Leifur 8
Eisenhower, Dwight D. 21
Eisenstein, Sergei 107, 109
Eisler, Colin 71
Eldjárn, Kristján 10
Elizabeth (queen) 179
Elton, G.R. 3, 85
Emerson, R.W. 76, 230
Emich, Birgit 116
Endacott, Jason 60
Engels, Friedrich 81–82, 87
Engle, Madeleine L' 123
Erasmus (Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus) 117–118
Erdélyi, Gabriella 219, 222
Espinosa, Gabriel de 95–97
Etty, Elsbeth 119
Evans, Joseph W. 113
Evans, Richard J. 86

Faassen, Sjoerd van x, 157, 160, 162
Fabre, Gladys 153
Farrell, John Aloysius ix
Faulkner, Estelle. *See* Estelle Oldham
Faulkner, Jill 169
Faulkner, Maud 172
Faulkner, William x, 17, 164–175
Febvre, Lucien 43, 45
Fedorowich, Kent 130
Feis, Agnita 155, 160
Feldman Barrett, Lisa 61–62, 64
Fernandez, James 93
Ferraro, Joanne M. 220, 222
Ferreira Furtado, Júnia 202
Fest, Joachim 237
Fetz, Bernhard 30, 41–43, 47, 54
Figes, Orlando 220, 222
Finlay, Robert 93, 218
Fish, Hamilton 85

Flaubert, Gustave 53–54
Foot, Michael x
Foote, Shelby 174
Forster, E.M. 178
Foucault, Michel 41, 43
Fourier, Charles 32
Fowler, Doreen 164
Frank, Manfred 42
Franken, Mannus 107
Franklin, Aretha 20
Fraser, Antonia 6
Frederick the Great (emperor) 77
Freeman, Douglas S. 53, 85
Freud, Sigmund 31
Frevert, Ute 59
Fry, Margery 183
Fry, Roger 183–187
Frye, Northrop 67
Für, Lajos 209, 223

Gaddis, John Lewis 222
Galilei, Galileo 115
Gallo, Max 50
Gammerl, Benno 60, 65
Gandhi, Indira 10
Garbo, Greta (ps. of Greta Louissa Gustafsson) 112
Gard, Roger Martin du 229
Garfunkel, Art 1
Garraty, John A. 85
Garriott, J.C. 132
Garton, Stephen 127–128
Gaulle, Charles de 229
Gee, Malcolm 157
Geertz, Clifford 59, 141, 192–193
Gellhorn, Martha x
George, Stefan 80
Geurts, Twan 115
Gillespie, Diane 186–187
Ginsberg, Elaine K. 185
Ginzburg, Carlo 17, 20, 122–123, 127, 189–190, 192, 197, 199, 212, 216–217, 230
Girardet, Raoul 49
Givens, Bryan 98
Glas, Frank de 234
Gleeson-White, Sarah 168, 172
Głuchowska, Lidia 149
Godard, Jean-Luc 109
Godzich, Wlad 41
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 77–79, 219
Goff, Jacques Le 43–44, 46, 51, 115, 189
Goldhagen, Daniel 237
Goldman, Jonathan 158
Gomme, Rachel 52
Gooch, G.P. 8
Gordon, Charles George 178
Gosse, Edmund 178–179
Gouchan, Yannick 114
Graaf, W. de 155
Gramsci, Antonio 82
Grant, Duncan 184
Gray, John 85
Gray, Richard 166
Greenberg, Clement 146–147, 149, 151
Greene, Nick 180
Grendi, Eduardo 123
Griffin, Robert J. 159
Grimwood, Michael 164
Gris, Juan 157
Gropius, Walter 156
Guerre, Martin (Arnaud du Tilh, also Pansette) 93, 212–213, 218
Guerre, Pierre (Bertrande) 212–213
Guggenheim, Peggy 229

Haan, Binne de ix, 16, 19, 24–25, 27–28, 30–32, 47, 74–75, 98–99, 103, 123, 141, 156, 190–193, 232
Haanstra, Bert 105, 109
Habermas, Tilmann 66
Hafstein, Valdimar Tryggvi 3
Hagyományai, Schmick János 224–225
Haimon, Paul 18
Hálfdanarson, Guðmundur 5
Hall, Edward 134
Hamblin, Robert W. 164, 168, 174–175
Hamilton, Ian 157
Hamilton, Nigel vii, ix, 15, 16, 24–39, 66, 74, 103, 119, 141, 179–180, 182, 193
Hanke, Edith 84
Hanlo, Jan ix
Harding, Warren 120
Harline, Craig 98
Harmsma, Jonne ix, 24–25, 27–28, 30–32, 47, 74, 103, 123, 141, 160, 193
Harper, Charles 134–136, 138

Harrington Tuke, Thomas 136
Harrold, Charles Frederick 78
Hauer, Rutger 109
Hawkes, Howard 168–170, 175
Hawthorne, Julian 22
Heap, Jane 157
Hedrick, Hannah L. 153
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 83
Heinich, Nathalie 46
Héjja, Julianna Erika 225
Hellman, Lillian x
Hemecker, Wilhelm 31–32, 47, 74
Henry, Clifford 138
Herder, Johann Gottfried 31, 74
Hermann, István 224
Heyde, Nikolai van der 109
Heynickx, Rajesh 148
Heywood, W. 123
Hin, Jan 108
Hirohito (emperor) 9
Hitler, A. 19, 29, 83, 121, 236–237
Hitzer, Bettina 64
Hobbes, Thomas 54
Hobsbawm, Eric 43, 86
Hoek, Els 154
Holmes, Richard 35, 121
Hólmgeirsdóttir, Ragnhildur 6
Homberger, Eric 27
Hook, Sidney 83–84, 87
Hoover, Edward 120
Hornby E. John 78
Horst, Herman ter 109
Howe, H.E. 65
Howes, Craig 28–29
Hughes, Kathryn 27, 33
Hughes, Ted 33
Hughes-Hallett, Lucy 157–158
Hühn, Peter 66
Huizinga, Johan 118
Humboldt, Alexander von 78
Hume, David 59
Hunt, Lynn 86
Huysseune, Michel 145, 149

Iggers, Georg G. 199
Ignatieff, Michael 2, 7
Illies, Florian 162
Illouz, Eva 65
Inge, M. Thomas 164, 171
Ivens, Joris 105–108

Jacoby, Hans 236
Jaffe, Aaron 158
Jakab, Réka 224
James, Henry 120
James, William 57, 80–81, 83, 87
Jameson, J. Franklin 85
Jamieson, John 128, 130
Jay, Anthony 9
Jefferson, Thomas 85
Jenkins, Keith 44, 199
Jewett, Helen 198
Jóhannesson, Guðni Thorlacius vii, 1–11
John Paul i (Albino Luciani, pope) 120
John Paul ii (Karol J. Wojtyla, pope) 115, 118
Johnson, Boris 88
Johnson, Lyndon B. 4, 23, 53, 72–73, 121
Johnson, Samuel 55–57, 74, 76–77
Jong, Loe de 237
Jonsson, Else 168, 173
Jónsson, Már 204
Jordanova, Ludmilla 49
Josselin, Ralph 93, 197–198
Joyce, James 229
Joyce, Patrick 45
Joyeux-Prunel, Béatrice 144, 149
Joyner, C.W. 122

Kandinsky, Wassily 142–145, 147, 150–152, 156, 159–162
Kant, Immanuel 75
Karafyllis, Nicole C. 65
Kaster, Richard 62, 65
Kawin, Bruce 168
Kaye, Sidney 132
Kearns Goodwin, Doris 121
Kelly, Kitty ix
Kendall, Joshua 4
Kennedy, John F. vii, 34
Kennedy, Joseph P. 34
Kennedy, Kathleen 121
Kennedy, Rose 34
Kéroualle, Louise de 200
Kershaw, Ian 29
Kippen, Rebecca 133
Kissinger, Henry 9–10

Kisters, Sandra 148
Kleijngeld, A.M.P. 160
Klein, Christian 30
Knox, John 77
Koch, Jeroen 116
Kok, Antony 154–155, 160–161
Kracauer, Siegfried 31, 47, 222
Kries, Gustav 128–129
Kristeller, Paul Oskar 222
Kruger, Otto 108
Kukkonen, Karin 66
Kumar, Vinay 133
Kupka, František 162

Labrousse, Ernest 43
LaCapra, Dominick 93
Lacouture, Jean 44, 50
Lane, Albert 128
Lane, Helen 7
Langer, Phil C. 56
Lantink, Frans Willem 116
Lässig, Simone 25–27, 29–30, 141
Leaska, Mitchell A. 180
Lee, Hermione 74, 178, 183
Lee, Robert E. 122
Lee, Sidney 177, 181
Leen, Frederik 145
Léger, Fernand 157
Leighten, Patricia 163
Lenin, Vladimir 83–84
Lennox, Caroline 200–201
Lennox, Cecilia 201
Lennox, Charles 200–201
Lennox, Charles (jr.) 201
Lennox, Emily 200–201
Lennox, George 201
Lennox, Louisa 200
Lennox, Sarah 200–201
Leo x (Giovanni de' Medici, pope) 116
Leonard, Jos 142
Lepetit, Bernard 51
Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel 21, 43–44, 93, 190, 230
Levéltár, Békés Megyei 225
Levi, Albert William 87
Levi, Giovanni 17, 19, 20, 45, 47, 140, 190, 192, 215, 230, 237
Levi-Strauss, Claude 43
Lewis, Percy Windham 158
Lewis, Thomas S.W. 185
Leys, Ruth 65
Lichau, Karsten 71
Ligt, Bart de 158
Lijphart, Arend 103, 231–232
Lindsay, Kenneth 144
Lindsay, Lisa 26–27
Link, Arthur S. 85
Linthorst, Gerdin 105
Lissitzky, El 155–156
Lissitzky, Jen 155
Lissitzky-Küpers, Sophie 155
Lista, Giovanni 155
Lloyd, Christopher 73
Lodge, David 41
Loeb, Vernon 121
Longstreet, James ('Pete') 122
Longueil, Christophe de 116
Looper, Michael de 134
López-Muñoz, Francisco 132
Lorenzen-Schmidt, Klaus-Joachim 205
Loriga, Sabina 46, 74–75, 78, 123, 127
Louis ix (king of France) 44, 51
Lowell, Amy x
Lowrey Jr., Perrin H. 173–174
Loyola, Ignatius 32
Lucas, Duncan A. 65
Luis (king of Portugal) 95
Lumière, Auguste 105
Lumière, Louis 105
Lurie, Peter 168
Luther, Martin 77, 116–117
Lutz, Helma 56
Luykx, J.B. 235
Luykx, Paul 110–112
Lynn, Jonathan 9
Lyon, Martyn 82
Lyon, Mary 182

Maanen, Hans van 231
MacCarthy, Desmond 186
Macdonald, John A. 7
Macedo, Maria De 98
Macfarlane, Alan 93, 197–198
Mackay, Ruth 95–97
Mackenzie King, William Lyon 9
MacMillan, Margaret 88

MacRaild, Donald M. 73, 76
Maertz, Gregory 79
Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi VII, X, 2, 6, 15, 20, 24, 89–99, 123, 189, 191, 193, 195–210, 206–209, 211–219, 221–222, 227
Mahomet (prophet) 76–77
Mailer, Norman X
Malcolm, Janet 33–34
Malevitsj, Kazimir 162
Malone, Dumas 85
Man, Paul de 41, 51
Mann, Heinrich 35
Mann, Thomas 35
Manning, Cardinal 178
Marbot, Marcellin 221
Maria Theresa (queen) 224, 226
Maritain, Jacques 113
Marshall, Thurgood X
Marsman, H. 163, 235
Martyn, Wynnt 130
Marx, Karl 81, 82, 115
Matt, Susan J. 61, 64, 68
Mauriac, François 228
Mawson, Douglas VIII
Mayo, Archie 108
McCabe, Colin 42
McCarthy, Todd M. 169–170
McEwin, Emma VIII, 19, 176–188
McKenna, Marc 4
McKible, Adam 157
McLaren, Angus 91–93, 204
McMahon, Marie 199
McNeillie, Andrew 183
McTaggart, Lynne 121
Medick, Hans 98
Mehan, G. Tracy 27
Meister, Daniel R. 84
Melders, Robert 142
Melick, Ben van 234
Menocchio (Domenico Scandella) 217–218
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 63
Mérode, Willem de (ps. of W.E. Keuning) 233
Merwick, Donna 198
Meulenhoff, J.H. 234
Meyer, Eduard 84
Meyers, Jeffrey 157
Michaud, Louis-Gabriel 230
Michelangelo (Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarotti Simoni) 117
Mierau, Konstantin 190
Milius, Lena 155, 157, 160
Miller, Ian 139
Miller, Joseph 27
Minow-Pinkney, Makiko 180
Minter, David 164–165
Mitchell, Piers D. 134
Moffat, Gordon 133
Molle, Leen van 149
Molnár, András 225
Mondrian, Piet 150, 156–158, 161–162
Monk, Ray 16
Monroe, Marylin X, 5
Montgomery, Bernard VII, 35–36
Moorsel, Nelly van. *See* Nelly van Doesburg
Moorsel, Wies van 155
More, Thomas 117
Morinck, Gerard 115
Morris, Benny 10
Morris, Edmund 39
Morrison, Mark S. 157
Morrow, John 78
Moses, Robert 23, 72–73
Moss Gottlieb, Laura 185
Mossel, Kaat IX
Moulin, Joanny 43, 114
Mourino, M.R. 136
Muir, E. 123, 197
Müller-Lehning, Arthur 153
Mulroney, Brian 7
Munro, Doug 4
Munslow, Alun 3, 45, 199
Mussert, Anton 112
Muybridge, Edward 105

Naftali, Tim 10
Napoleon (Bonaparte) 50, 81, 84, 221
Nasaw, David 84
Negri, Paola Antonia 94–95
Nero (Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus) 108
Ness, John 128
Neumann, Franz 54
Nevins, Allan 85
Nguyen, Phuong Ngoc 114
Nicholson, Nigel 184, 186
Nicolson, Harold 74–75, 178–179, 181

Nietzsche, Friedrich 80
Nightingale, Florence 179
Nissenbaum, Stephan 197–198
Nixon, Richard 9–10
Noë, Alva 62
Nolan, Melanie VIII, 23, 72–88
Nora, Pierre 43–44, 49
Noriel, Gérard 45
Norton Manning, Frederick 125
Norwich, John Julius 118
Nüdel, Ernst 155

Oakes, Francis 129–130
Oates, Stephen B. 164–166
Obama, Barack 119
Ólafsson, Davið 191, 205–206
Oldham, Estelle 164–165, 167–168
Olthof, Jelte 10
Oman, Carola 84
Ostaijen, Paul van 142, 163
Ottevanger, Alied 154–155
Oud, J.J.P. 153, 157, 159, 163

Padány Biró, Márton 224, 226
Paenhuysen, An 150
Paglia, Camille 42
Pahl, Kerstin Maria VIII, 17, 55–71
Paley, Ruth 4
Palmen, Eric IX, 18, 103–113
Palmer, Henry 128
Pálsson, Stefán 4
Palty, Elías 42
Pansette. *See* Guerre, Martin
Parini, Jay 164, 166–167
Parra, Pim de la 109
Passeron, Jean-Claude 51–54
Pastor, Ludwig 115
Peek, Charles A. 175
Peeters, Evert 149
Peeters, Jozef 142, 147, 150
Peltonen, Matti 21, 190, 192
Perez, Shimon 10
Pernau, Margrit 62
Petraeus, David 121
Petrie, Dennis W. 175
Philip II (king) 95–97
Philologus, Arnas Magnœs 204
Phyfer Gillis, Mary 175
Picabia, Francis 157
Picard, Raymond 41
Picasso, Pablo X
Pickett, George 122
Plamper, Jan 56, 59, 61, 68, 205
Plas, Michel van der (ps. of Ben Brinkel) 233
Plath, Sylvia X, 33
Plekhanov, George 81–83, 87
Plutarch (L. Mestrius) 55–56
Polak, Sara 10
Pomata, Gianna 98
Poni, Carlo 122–123, 189, 192, 197
Popkin, Jeremy D. 74, 117
Poppaea (empress) 108
Popper, Karl 16
Porter, Carolyne 164
Poulsen, Bjørn 205
Prampolini, Enrico 155
Price, Arthur Duke 131–132
Proust, Marcel 19, 31
Pudovkin, Vsevolod 106, 109
Puhova, Nadezhda 220
Put, Eddy 98

Rabaté, Jean-Michel 42, 44, 162
Rabelais, François 45
Racine, Jean 41, 45
Railey, Kevin 164, 175
Rainey, Lawrence 157
Rampton, David 164
Randall, James G. 85
Ransel, David L. 202
Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino) 117
Rastrick, Ólafur 2–3
Rattner Gelbart, Nina 204
Ravesteijn, S. van 235
Reagan, Ronald 10
Reay, Burry 204
Reddy, William M. 57–58, 60–61, 63, 65, 68, 205
Rees-Mogg, William 5
Renders, Hans VII, IX, XI, 1, 2, 6, 15–28, 30–32, 36–37, 47, 74–75, 98–99, 103, 114, 123, 140–141, 153–163, 189–196, 202–203, 228–238
Retford, Kate 70
Revel, Jacques 43–44, 46, 51, 192, 237

Reynolds, Frank 40
Richards, Lynne 231
Richter, Hans 155
Righart, Hans 104
Ringbom, Sixten 147
Rinsema, Evert 160–161
Robbins, Ben 168
Roberts, Phillip M. 134
Robertson, C.L. 137
Robespierre, Maximilien 82
Röhl, John C.G. 29
Rollyson, Carl IX, X, 17, 25–26, 29, 31, 35, 37, 140, 164–175
Romain, Jules 229
Romein, Jan 43
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano VII, 10
Rose, Jacqueline 236
Rosenberg, Léonce 157
Rosenberg, Philip 79
Rosenthal, Michael 184
Rosenwein, Barbara H. 57, 205
Ross, Chisholm 128–129
Roth, David T. X, 21, 122–139
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 77
Rudge, John 231
Ruggiero, G. 123, 197
Ruiter, Frans 231
Russell, Francis 119
Russell Bentley, Eric 80
Russell Hochschild, Arlie 60, 64–65
Ruttmann, Walter 105–106
Ryazanskaya, S. 82

Sackville-West, Vita 179–181, 185, 187
Sade, D.A.F. de 32
Sadowsky, Jonathan 136
Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de 119
Salemink, Theo 145
Salomon, Robert C. 63
Salvo, Louise De 180
Sanders, Mathijs 232
Santos, Fray Miguel de los 95–97
Sardica, José Miguel 45
Sartre, Jean-Paul 53
Saunders, Edward 47, 74
Saunders, Max 159
Schaepman, Jan 112
Scheer, Monique 62–65, 67–69
Schiebel, Martina 56
Schiller, Friedrich 78–79
Schnell, Rüdiger 57, 61, 70
Schoenmaekers, Mathieu 158
Schuyt, Kees 231
Schwitters, Kurt 155, 158
Sebastian I (king of Portugal) 95–97
Seigel, Jules Paul 79
Sensibar, Judith 168
Servellón, Sergio 143
Seuphor, M. (ps. of F. Berckelaers) 150
Sewel, Rob 82
Sfondrati, Agata 95
Shakespeare, William 77, 182
Shapiro, Michael 184
Shaw, William H. 82
Sidney, George 170
Simon, Paul 1
Simson, George 27
Sinclair, Eric 125, 128–131
Slot, Pim 108
Smet, Johan de 142, 145
Smith, Adam 59
Smith, Douglas 202
Smith, Jay M. 202
Smith, Jean Edward 39
Smyth, Ethel 184, 186–187
Soboul, Albert 43
Söhn, Gerhard 159
Solomon, Stefan 168, 172, 174
Sontag, Susan X
Sorensen, David R. 79
Spencer, Herbert 75, 80–81, 83, 87
Springs, Holly 166
Squire, J.C. 84
Stacey, Ernest 133
Stael, Germaine de 50
Stainbrook, Edward 137
Stalin, Joseph 83, 121, 220
Stanfield, James 55–60, 66–69, 71
Stearns, Carol Z. 60, 69–70
Stearns, Peter N. 57, 60, 67–70, 205
Stefánsson, Kári 4
Stein, Gertrude 33–34
Stein, Jean 168
Steinke, Ronen 48
Stephen, Leslie 177
Stewart, G.R. 122, 198

Stirling, John 77
Stone, Donald 78
Stone, Phil 174
Stopford, Robert 132
Straaten, Evert van 154
Strachey, Lytton 75, 178–179
Streletsky, Dmitry 220
Sturluson, Snorri 8
Süleyman the Great (sultan) 117
Summers, Anthony 120
Süto, Wilma 231
Swan, Henry 132–133, 139
Sweet, John 26–27
Szijártó, István M. VIII, X, 24, 123, 189–190, 195–200, 205–227

Talsma, Jaap 104, 232
Tamm, Marek 60
Tapp, E.J. 83, 86–87
Tarr, Rodger L. 79, 174
Taverne, Ed 231
Taylor, Avram 73, 76
Taylor, Charles 62
Terburg, Cas 113
Terpastra, Nicholas 202
Teunissen, Jan 107
Thatcher, Margaret 88
Thompson, E.P. 43
Thorbecke, Johan Rudolph 110
Thoroddsen, Gunnar VII, 4–5
Throntveit, Trygve 83
Tierney, Gene 170
Tillyard, Stella 200–201
Toklas, Alice 33–34
Tomalin, Claire 35
Tomes, Nancy 125
Tomkins, Silvan 65
Torelli, Ludovica 94
Trautmann, Joanna 184, 186
Treia, D.J. 79, 174
Trepp, Anne-Charlott 98
Trevelyan, G.M. 86
Trevelyan, R.C. 186
Trevor Roper, Hugh 237
Tromp, Will 155
Trotsky, Leon 84
Troy, Nancy J. 157
Troyat, Henri 120
Troyer, Prosper de 146
Trudeau, Pierre 7
Truman, Harry S. 21
Tuider, Elisabeth 56
Tuijn, Marguerite 153
Tuke, Daniel Hack 131–132
Tünde, Cserpes 211
Turvey, Malcolm 16
Tyssens, Jeffrey XI, 17, 40–54
Tzara, Tristan (ps. of Sami Rosenstock) 155, 158, 161

Ucha-Udabe, Ronaldo 132
Ullmann, Liv 114
Ulshöfer, Gotlind 65
Urgo, Joseph 164

Vandereycken, Walter 136
Vargas Llosa, Mario 7
Vasari, Giorgio 116
Veltman, David XI, 17, 47, 140–152, 189, 191–196, 202–203
Ven, Monique van der 109
Verhoeven, Paul 109
Verstappen, Wim 109
Verweij, Michel 115, 118
Verwey, Albert 160
Victoria (queen) 179
Virgo, Peter 144
Voorst, Sandra van 231
Vovelle, Michel 43
Vries, Jan de 162

Waller, F.C. 160
Walsh, Dorothy 85
Warden, John 128–129
Washington, George 53
Washton Long, Rose-Carol 147
Watson, James G. 170
Waugh, Edwin 45
Wayne, John (ps. of M.R. Morrison) 171
Weber, Max 84
Weber, Nicholas Fox IX
Weinberg, Steve 84
Weinstein, Philip 164, 167
Weisgerber, Jean 145
Welter, J.Th. 108
Wenderski, Michał 149

Werkman, Hans 233
Werkman, Hendrik N. 163
West, Rebecca x
Wheeler, Ephraim 198
White, John 128
Wichman, Erich 158
Wilder, Thornton 122
Wilhelm II (German emperor) 29, 35
Williams, Elizabeth A. 135–136
Williams, Joan 168, 170, 174
Williamson, Joel 166
Wils, Kaat 149
Wilson, Clyde N. 85
Wilson, Woodrow 85
Winock, Michel 50
Winter, Janus de 158, 161
Wintgens, Doris 153
Wittenberg, Judith 164–165, 167
Wittgenstein, Ludwig 16
Woods, Frederick Adams 84
Woolf, Leonard 176–178, 185
Woolf, Virginia 19, 31, 47, 176–188
Wordsworth, William 183
Worringer, Wilhelm 143
Wulf, Andrea 78
Wusten, Herman van der 104

Zagorin, Perez 44
Zamoyski, Adam 221–222
Zemon Davis, Natalie 93, 98, 212–213, 217–218
Zervas, Josef 138
Zoltán Boldizsár, Simon 211
Zweig, Stefan 229
Zwiers, Maarten 10

Recent academic historiography has seen a profusion of theoretical perspectives on biography, both analytical and descriptive. Yet many biographers still fear 'theory' as antithetical to accessible narration of real lives.
This volume presents eighteen essays by more than a dozen scholars and practitioners from Australia, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, and the United States who seek to banish such fear. Writing with candor, wide experience and familiarity with modern teaching, they examine the riches greeting the biographer willing to think more deeply about biography: its inner workings and rationale in a world still hungry for fact and truth.

Contributors are: Nigel Hamilton, Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, Emma McEwin, Melanie Nolan, Kerstin Maria Pahl, Eric Palmen, Hans Renders, Carl Rollyson, David T. Roth, István M. Szijártó, Jeffrey Tyssens, and David Veltman.

HANS RENDERS is Professor in History and Theory of Biography at the University of Groningen (The Netherlands). He has written two biographies and has published on biographical theory in various international journals. He is Editor-in-Chief of the series *Biography Studies*.

DAVID VELTMAN has a PhD from the University of Groningen. His dissertation, a biography of the artist Felix de Boeck, was written at the Biography Institute. He has published before in *Biography. An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*.

ISBN 978-90-04-49854-9

ISSN 2468-2497

BRILL.COM/BIO

BIO 3

FEAR OF THEORY

HANS RENDERS and DAVID VELTMAN (Eds.)

BRILL