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Great Biographers

Considering biography as a genre demanding to be further studied in its own right, this journal issue gathers articles on remarkable biographers, who may be called ‘great’ in the sense that their works constitute landmarks, or at least significant advancements in the history of biography. To steer clear of a timeworn debate, these papers do not pretend to decide whether biography belongs to literature or to history, or if it pertains to some other field of the humanities. They simply consider biography per se, as a form of writing that has taken many different forms, but which does have a history as such, from the classic to the modern. The very concept of ‘great biographers’ points to that of a canon of biography, to which some obvious figures like Plutarch or Boswell, among many others, have an indisputable title to belong.

A journal number on ‘Great Biographers’ can obviously not pretend to propose a Pantheon, but it can profitably concentrate on select examples of figures who stand out for the originality of their contributions to biography. In a style that is reminiscent of the ‘antiquarians’ who, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from Izaak Walton and John Aubrey to Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, were the inventors of modern biography, this is a collection of examples, brought together by the elective affinities of the authors, with none of the pretensions to exhaustivity that characterized the editors of dictionaries of biographies. As an anthology of academic articles taking the works of biographers as their objects of research, it is a rare specimen in contemporary criticism, especially in so far as biography is understood here as distinct from autobiography, considering that the two genres go by very different generic principles.

The latter remark is symptomatic of the peculiar situation of biography in the humanities today. In the countries where biographical studies have had the greatest impetus since the last decades of the twentieth century, that is to say mainly the United Kingdom and the USA—where bourgeois individualism has long been a fact of life, if not a religious doctrine—they have developed under the guise of ‘life writing,’ a synthetic field of research encompassing auto/biography, memoirs, life narratives, and much more. The ‘What is Life-Writing?’ page of the website of the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing at Wolfson College gives this wide-ranging definition, presenting life-writing as a crossover transdisciplinary emerging field:

Life-writing involves, and goes beyond, biography. It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factual. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups. Life-writing includes autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals (written and documentary), anthropological data, oral testimony, and eye-witness accounts. It is not only a literary or historical specialism, but is

relevant across the arts and sciences, and can involve philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists.¹

Several members of the American association called the Biographers' International Organization (BIO), gathered at the Wolfson College Oxford Centre for Life-Writing on the occasion of a conference day on 'Biography Beyond Borders' in November 2016, voiced the opinion in conversation that life-writing is the stalking-horse thanks to which biography has been reintroduced in academia. Stalking-horse or Jonah's whale? In the above quotation, the vanishing act performed on biography (nowhere to be found after the shazaam of the first sentence) may be read as an ominous symptom, redoubled by the less visible one that 'life-writing' is a literal translation into English of *'βιο-γραφία,'* a word that appeared in late Greek antiquity around 500 CE, and in English sometime in the seventeenth century, to become an endangered conceptual species, all but subsumed in 'life-writing' in the twenty-first. In fact, life-writing is a polymorphous Leviathan, whose pluri-inter-trans-disciplinary purpose is both an advantage and a hindrance; it is an advantage because it reasserts the individual perspective in academic studies; it is a hindrance because it goes on very congenially denying biography its relevance as a specific object of research. By a Wittgensteinian 'surmounting,' 'Life-writing involves, and goes beyond biography,' or as Ted Hughes would say of the modern scientific spirit, it 'shuts out the world's knocking / With a welcome'². However, we should resist falling into Hughes's Manichean axiology, for there is obviously no hidden agenda to this state of things. Many luminaries of the life-writing school happen to be celebrated biographers. Joking apart, it is simply that the work of studying biography as a genre in its own right has not yet been really undertaken. One of the good reasons for this is that the most creative minds who have turned to the subject by far prefer to write biographies, all the more so because the talents and energies required of biographers are the qualities (or very nearly so) of an academic research writer, whereas that is not at all true of novelists, poets, and dramatists. For the self-same reasons, very little reflexive attention has been paid, for instance, to the essay, and to criticism as literary genres. It is so much more rewarding to invest your energies in becoming a biographer, an essayist or a critic!

The reasons for the relative, seasonal resistance of the academic world to biography are sufficiently well-known. They have been analysed in great part by François Dosse in *Le Pari biographique*³. In literary science, the Theory period, culminating in Roland Barthes's 'Death of the Author,'⁴ was the outcome of a discourse inaugurated in the first decade of the twentieth century by Marcel Proust, who, contradicting Sainte-Beuve's biographical method of literary criticism, declared it utterly mistaken and asserted 'that a book is the produce of another me than the one we manifest in our habits, in society, and in our lives.'⁵ In philosophy, echoing Louis Althusser's advocacy of 'theoretical Marxist anti-humanism,'

¹ 'What is Life writing,' Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, <https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/what-life-writing>, 19 December 2016.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* [1921], London, Routledge, 1981, § 6.54; Ted Hughes, 'Egg-Head,' 1957, *Collected Poems*, ed. Paul Kegan, London, Faber & Faber, 2003, p. 33.

³ François Dosse, *Le Pari biographique: écrire une vie* [2005], Paris, La Découverte, 2011. See also J. Moulin, ed., *Lives of the Poets: Poetry and Biography*, special issue of *Études anglaises, revue du monde Anglophone*, No. 66/4 (October-December 2013) and *Towards Biography Theory. Cercles (revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone)*, No. 35 (2015), www.cercles.com.

⁴ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' *The Rustle of Language* [1983], trans. Richard Howard, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, p. 49-55 ('La mort de l'auteur' [1968], *Le Bruissement de la langue: Essais critiques IV*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, p. 63-70).

⁵ '[...] qu'un livre est le produit d'un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vies,' Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* [1908], Paris, Gallimard, 1954, p. 127, our translation.

Michel Foucault could declare, ‘Man disappears in philosophy, not as an object of knowledge, but as a subject of freedom and existence.’⁶ However, a few years later, Foucault de facto turned to practicing biography, writing the lives of eighteenth-century mental homes inmates: ‘Singular lives that, by what chance I know not, have become strange poems, that is what I have wanted to gather in a kind of herbal,’⁷ and Roland Barthes, after having yielded to the temptation of writing his autobiography, contributed to the theory of biography the concept of ‘biographeme,’ which was in fact an unacknowledged Bloomian revision of Plutarch’s ‘detail.’⁸ In the same year when Barthes published his ‘Death of the Author,’ Pierre Bourdieu issued his plaidoyer against biography, ‘The Biographical Illusion,’ whereas from the early 1980s on Daniel Bertaux⁹ could already look back on the use of life narratives as a widespread method in sociology, revisiting the participant observation of earlier years, pioneered especially by the Chicago School in America and Mass Observation in Britain. In history the same methodological evolution can be witnessed between the second generation of the *Annales* school, characterized by the ‘long duration’ advocated chiefly by Fernand Braudel and Georges Duby, and the third generation of Annalists, or ‘*nouveaux historiens*,’ among whom are Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, turning the tables by focussing on individual medieval peasant lives in *Montaillou, village Occitan*, Pierre Nora who publishes historians’ life-narratives in his *Essais d’ego-histoire*, and Jacques Le Goff with his celebrated biography of Saint Louis.¹⁰ At the same time, the Italian historians of *la microstoria* achieved a comparable paradigmatic change, among whose best ambassadors are Carlo Ginzburg, with his *The Cheese and the Worms*, and Giovanni Levi, with his history of a seventeenth-century Piedmontese exorcist.¹¹

On the whole, the academic aversion to biography may have been an idiosyncrasy of the twentieth century, a discourse that culminated between the late 1960s and the early 1980s: a period that corresponds to the so-called ‘linguistic turn.’ In the humanities, i.e. in literary studies, history and the social sciences, all disciplines have undergone a more or less pronounced swerve away from that radical stance, a *lysis* corresponding to the *crisis* of the linguistic turn, which Hans Renders has called *The Biographical Turn*, in an anthology of critical essays which make a plea to view ‘biography as a critical methodology in the humanities.’¹² In a previous volume, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, Hans Renders deconstructed the ideological bias of life-writing, and Binne de Haan pointed at its inhibiting effect on biography studies in an article entitled ‘The Eclipse of Biography in Life Writing,’¹³

⁶ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, Penguin, 1969, p. 229-230 (*Pour Marx*, Paris, Maspero, 1965); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1970], London, Routledge, 2005, p. 334 (*Les Mots et les choses*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966).

⁷ M. Foucault, ‘La Vie des hommes infâmes,’ *Les Cahiers du chemin*, No. 29 (1977), p. 12-29, reprinted in *Dits et Écrits 1954-1988*, vol. 3, 1976-1979, eds. Daniel Lefert & F. Ewald, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 237-253, p. 237.

⁸ ‘Si j’étais écrivain, et mort, comme j’aimerais que ma vie se réduisît, par les soins d’un biographe amical et désinvolte, à quelques détails, à quelques goûts, à quelques inflexions, disons: des “biographèmes,” dont la distinction et la mobilité pourraient voyager hors de tout destin,’ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* [1971], Paris, Seuil, 1980, p. 14.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘L’Illusion biographique,’ *Actes RSS*, No. 62/63 (juin 1968), p. 69-72; Daniel Bertaux, ed., *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1981 (Daniel Bertaux, ed., *Le Récit de vie; perspective ethnosociologique*, Paris, Nathan, 1996).

¹⁰ Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975; Pierre Nora, *Essais d’ego-histoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986; Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996.

¹¹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 (*Il formaggio e i vermi*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976); Giovanni Levi, *L’eredità immateriale. Carriera di un esorcista nel Piemonte del seicento*, Torino, Einaudi, 1985.

¹² Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 10.

¹³ Binne de Haan, ‘The Eclipse of Biography in Life Writing,’ *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, eds. Hans

to which Craig Howes replied in an article of the 2016 collection, where he deplored the polemic, but acknowledged the point made by Renders and De Haan: ‘despite diametrically opposed emphasis in terms of Life Writing, there can still be productive, if limited, points of convergence.’¹⁴

The present issue of the e-journal *The Great Historical Figures in Arts and Literature* means to take stock of the state of the art in biographical studies as it is synthesized in *The Biographical Turn*. Firstly, there is today a strong and well-established paradigmatic swerve towards biography in the humanities, accompanied by a strong tropism towards biography and the biographic in literature and cinema. In the field of literature, nearly all the works that have won the major literary prizes in France, theoretically the country of the death of the author among other subjects, are either ‘biofictions’—biographical fictions or fictional biographies—or downright biographies.¹⁵ Secondly, this current state of generic hybridization of other genres with biography creates a situation comparable to the novelization Mikhail Bakhtin was witnessing nearly one century ago, so that if we substitute ‘biography’ for ‘the novel’ in the following quote it sounds strikingly apposite:

Therefore, the *biographization* of other genres does not imply their subjection to an alien generic canon; on the contrary, *biographization* implies their liberation from all that serves as a brake on their unique development, from all that would change them along with *biography* into some sort of stylization of forms that have outlived themselves.¹⁶

This phenomenon of hybridization in the literary field properly speaking is mirrored by the essentially transdisciplinary aspects of life-writing in the field of academic research. In the effervescence of this change in the making, the variegation and multifariousness of the phenomenon is both surprising and dazzling, so much so that it is difficult to figure out that biography—a genre that has been suppressed and kept under a bushel by what has been a dominant discourse in the humanities until very recently—may indeed occupy a central position in the current phase of literary history and literary science. It may be that the linguistic turn, with its fetishization of text over and above any author, and of superstructural history, was in fact a ‘logocentric turn,’ based on a valorization of Imagination as ‘the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’ and History as a ‘process without a subject,’¹⁷ which its standard-bearers inherited from the romantic ideology, albeit against their better knowledge and in spite of all their protestations to the contrary. Be it as it may, that is a hypothesis that will have to be tested at greater length on some other occasion.

For the time being, this collection of essays originated from the remark that few studies are devoted to the works and significance of biographers, whereas the greater bulk of

Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 177-194.

¹⁴ Craig Howes, ‘What are we turning from?’, *The Biographical Turn*, *op. cit.*, p. 165-175, p. 174.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Alain Buisine, ‘Biofictions,’ *Le Biographique, Revue des sciences humaines*, No. 224 (1991), p. 7-13; Anne-Marie Monluçon and Agathe Salha, eds., *Fictions biographiques, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2007.

¹⁶ From ‘Therefore, the *novelization* of other genres does not imply their subjection to an alien generic canon; on the contrary, *novelization* implies their liberation from all that serves as a brake on their unique development, from all that would change them along with *the novel* into some sort of stylization of forms that have outlived themselves,’ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘The Epic and the Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study in the Novel’ [1941], in *The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 39, our italics.

¹⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* [1817], ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vol. in 1, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, vol. I, p. 304; Louis Althusser, *Lénine et la philosophie* [1969], followed by *Marx et Lénine devant Hegel*, Paris, Maspéro, 1975, p. 67.

academic discourse goes on being produced on the works of novelists, poets and dramatists. Nevertheless, biography remains more than ever an established literary genre, with a specific market, devoted publishers, and numerous sui generis literary awards. In the United Kingdom, the United States of America and France, more than a dozen literary prizes rewarding biographies can be numbered in each of these countries. In France, more particularly, several such literary prizes are recent creations.¹⁸ Although there is obviously a renaissance of biography, it has a rich history of its own, all the way down from classical antiquity, which has never been undertaken with the same thoroughgoing dedication as the history of other genres or of general literature. There are indeed short historical surveys, and historical introductions in books of theory,¹⁹ and there are also very well-documented histories of biography in given periods, usually of national scopes, but indeed there is to this day no 'long duration' history or historical anthology of biography to speak of.

However, there exist remarkable works of erudition on the biographers of given periods in given cultures. For instance, Arnaldo Momigliano has demonstrated how biography originated in Greece as early as the 5th century BCE. More recently, Élisabeth Gaucher has studied biography as generically distinct from hagiography in the late Middle Ages. Donald Stauffer and Vivian De Sola Pinto have researched the inchoative phases of English biography up to the seventeenth century. Mark Longaker and William Epstein, in quite different styles, have made very insightful contributions to the study of the eighteenth-century British biography, while the Victorian age has been aptly mapped by Juliette Atkinson and David Amigoni. Mark Longaker again wrote a second work of case studies on biographers of the early twentieth century, and much has been written on Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, although a comprehensive analysis of the New Biography movement remains to be written.²⁰ By contrast, very few monograph studies have been devoted to the works of biographers who have written from the Second World War to present times. Although the genre has been paid some attention in secondary education syllabi, biography is rarely studied in university courses, least of all the works of modern biographers, rather surprisingly so given the vivacity of the genre over the latest decades. It is true that there is an output of trivial productions, but such is also the case for all other genres at all times: that cannot be a valid justification for the neglect. For, on the other hand, just as in all other genres, there are also 'great' biographers: remarkable authors, whose works, whether they belong rather to popular culture or to academic erudition, stand out from the common run-of-the-mill, and deserve our time and our consideration. To study them, in the continuation of the tradition set up by the authors mentioned above, who have worked rather on earlier periods of the history

¹⁸ See for instance the 'Prix de la biographie de l'Académie française' (1980), the 'Prix Goncourt de la biographie' (1987), the 'Prix de la Biographie Le Point / Ville de Nîmes' (2004), the 'Prix de la Biographie de la Ville d'Hossegor' (2007), the 'Prix Geneviève Moll de la Biographie' (2011), etc.

¹⁹ See, e. g. Daniel Madelénat, *La Biographie*, Paris, PUF, 1984; François Dosse, *Le Pari biographique: écrire une vie*, *op. cit.*; Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2007; Ann Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007; Hermione Lee, *Biography, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; Wilhelm Hemecker, *Die Biographie: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2009.

²⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography*, 1971, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1993; Élisabeth Gaucher, *La Biographie chevaleresque: typologie d'un genre (XIII^e-XV^e siècle)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 1994; Donald Albert Stauffer, *English Biography Before 1700* [1930], New York, Russel, 1965; Vivian De Sola Pinto, ed., *English Biography in the Seventeenth Century*, London, Harrap, 1951; Mark Longaker, *English Biography in the Eighteenth Century*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931; William H. Epstein, *Recognizing Biography*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987; David Amigoni, *Victorian Biography. Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993; Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Lives Reconsidered. A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010; Mark Longaker, *Contemporary Biography*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934.

of biography, involves surmounting the particular difficulty that the tools forged so far for the study of other genres are in part inadequate. They will have to be adapted, and new concepts will no doubt have to be invented in the process. This will answer a need that is not just to develop the study of biography per se, but that is also most likely to propose advancements of knowledge in literary science, at a time when literature is manifestly undergoing a biographical turn that redefines its significance for the reading public.

The articles in this journal number do not address a particular national culture, although the great biographers they offer to study as examples belong to the Western World, that is to say to Continental Europe, the UK and the USA. The collection does not limit its scope to a very narrow period of literary history in particular, but these articles taken together span Western biography in modern times, from the eighteenth century to the present, thus beginning with the age of the ‘rise of biography,’ simultaneous with the ‘rise of the novel,’ emerging from the ‘collections’ of lives by seventeenth-century antiquarians: a tradition to which Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* still belonged, just before his biographer, James Boswell, gave biography its longer literary form.²¹ Of course, these articles cannot have any claim to make an exhaustive ensemble, they are only a florilegium of examples, compiled with a degree of arbitrariness in so far as they have been selected among the responses to a call for papers. When the time came to make a decision on the order in which they should be arranged, it has clearly appeared that what made most sense was to let them follow one another in the chronological order of their subjects, that is to say in order of the birthdates of the biographers under study in each of them, because this provides a rapid overall survey of the history of biography since the eighteenth century. Although this brief anthology strides over this wide historical landscape, as it were, in seven-leagues boots, it does so in very slow steps, making meticulous, insightful soundings of particular cases, each of which are enlightening representatives of a particular moment in the evolution of biography. Neither is the scope limited to a particular national culture, or cultural area, but rather it samples out five different countries of the Western world: Germany, the United States of America, France, the United Kingdom, and Poland. Here is a table of the biographers in the order in which they come under study, with their respective dates and countries:

Friedrich Schlichtegroll	1765-1822	Germany
Washington Irving	1783-1859	USA
Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve	1804-1869	France
Theodore Ayrault Dodge	1842-1909	USA
André Maurois	1885-1967	France
Harold Nicholson	1886-1968	UK
Jerzy Ficowski	1924-2006	Poland
Nigel Hamilton	1944-	USA
Richard Holmes	1945-	UK
Hermione Lee	1948-	UK

Rather than to summarize the articles one after the other, it seems more interesting to point out that, read in a row, they elicit an overall implicit coherence in the generic development of biography that transcends the boundaries of national cultures. Thus, reading Tobias

²¹ Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert, and Sanderson* [1670, 1675], 2 vol., Boston, Hilliard, Gray; Cambridge, Brown, Shattuck, 1832; John Aubrey, *Brief Lives, Chiefly of Contemporaries, Set Down by John Aubrey, Between the Years 1669 & 1696*, 2 vol., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1898; Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets [Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets (1779-1781)]*, ed. Mrs. Alexander Napier, 2 vol. London, George Bell Sons, 1890; James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* [1787], Ware, Herts., Wordsworth Classics, 1999.

Heinrich's presentation of Schlichtegroll, readers who are rather familiar with other cultural areas will find striking resemblances with the state of biography in their own domains of speciality in the Enlightenment period: the *Nekrolog* is a project that is very much in keeping, for example, with the rise of biography in Augustan England, in a movement that goes from the early efforts of the seventeenth-century antiquarians to the emergence of dictionaries of biography in the nineteenth century, like the *Biographie de tous les hommes morts et vivants ayant marqué, à la fin du XVIII^e siècle et au cours de celui actuel par leurs rangs, leurs emplois, leurs talents, leurs écrits, leurs malheurs, leurs vertus, leurs crimes, etc.*, by Louis-Gabriel Michaud (1773-1858), printed for the first time in 1802 in Breslau and Leipzig, Germany, a precursor to his better-known *Biographie Universelle, ancienne et moderne: histoire par ordre alphabétique de la vie publique et privée de tous les hommes*, which he printed and published under his own imprint in Paris, from 1811 to 1843, with his brother Jean-François Michaud (1767-1839).

Nikol Dziub's study of the biographical works of Washington Irving, and Christopher Griffin's article on Theodore Ayrault Dodge, will resonate with comparable examples in other countries of the political uses of biography in the nineteenth-century construction of national discourses, backed up by Hegelian visions of history like those of Thomas Carlyle, for whom 'The History of the world is but the Biography of great men,' or Ralph Waldo Emerson: 'There is properly no history, only biography.'²² That is the historical and ideological context in which Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, such as Damien Fortin studies him here, grounds his work, and his biographical method of criticism must be appreciated as an emanation of the age of Ferdinand Brunetière's post-Darwinian *Évolution des genres*, and Gustave Lanson's contextualized, biographical approach to literature.²³

It is precisely against this overall literary *Weltanschauung* of Sainte-Beuve's, Lanson's and Brunetière's, that Marcel Proust reacts in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, as a precursor to modernist New Criticism and postmodernist Nouvelle Critique. However, biography also had its own modernist period, embodied by the movement of the New Biography, that took its name from two essays by Virginia Woolf, whose best-known figurehead is no doubt Giles Lytton Strachey, with his characteristically anti-Victorian stance, conceiving of biographical writing as resolutely literary and critical of the very concept of 'great men.' The New Biography is represented here by two of its other luminaries: the Englishman Harold Nicholson, whose work is analysed by Maryam Thirriard, and the Frenchman André Maurois, presented here by Joanny Moulin: Maurois is perhaps the example that comes readiest to mind of a biographer having achieved canonical status in French literature.

The Polish *homme de lettres* Jerzy Ficowski, whom Marcin Romanski takes as his research object, belong to the next generation of biographers, and in a sense he is doing the reverse of Lytton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*, for his biographical work on Bruno Schultz aims at rescuing from criminal erasure an important literary figure. On the other hand, his work can be read in the continuation of Virginia Woolf's ambition in *Orlando* and *A Room with a View*, as it demonstrates the political impact of biography, when it speaks up for persons from suppressed social categories, like women or gay writers, and proves to have a special power to give them the place they deserve in history. This is very close to the position sustained by Nigel Hamilton, presented here by Hans Renders, that biography can bring correctives to history. In a related way, Hermione Lee, a woman biographer of women writers, is vindicated here by Béatrice Mousli, reversing the roles to brush up a portrait of the

²² Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*, ed. Annie Russell Marble, London, Macmillan, 1905, p. 39; Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'History,' *Essays*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, p. 7-44, p. 15.

²³ Ferdinand Brunetière, *L'Évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*, Paris, Hachette, 1890; Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, Paris, Hachette, 1894.

biographer. Of the three contemporary biographers whose works are distinguished in these papers, Richard Holmes, analysed by Binne de Haan with Hans Renders, has the particularity of having contributed precious reflections on biography as a literary genre, by publishing at least two books—*Footsteps* and *Sidetracks*²⁴—who qualify as ‘ego-biographies,’ or equivalents for a modern British biographer of what Pierre Nora’s *Essais d’ego-histoire* are to some contemporary French historians.

Finally, these articles have a striking family resemblance with one another in terms of the styles and the methods with which they approach their sundry subjects, although no particular effort was made to harmonize them on these heads, and in spite of the fact that some of their authors are historians, while others are literature scholars, all of them coming from five different countries with their own academic traditions. This family resemblance could be summed up as a peculiar kind of revisited literary historicism that blends the textualism of the second half of the twentieth century with a strong recontextualization of literary studies, mainly resulting from the impact of New Historicism and Reception Theories. Therefore, the texts gathered here are instances of scholarship that meet up halfway between literary and historical studies, the latter having just as quietly but strongly assimilated the influences of textualist philosophers of history like Hayden White, as well as those of the breakthroughs made by *microstoria* and *nouvelle histoire*. No doubt this is essentially due to the very nature of biographers’ works. The articles gathered in this journal issue are contributions to the emerging movement of *biography studies*: academic researches that take the works of biographers as their objects. We have seen earlier that they had forerunners in the course of the twentieth century, whose torch they are now carrying onwards. Biography studies are still, as in these pages, striving to affirm their methods and their styles, and they will soon be recognizably speaking in their own voice.

²⁴ Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, and *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer*, London, Harper Press, 2000.