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ideas of selfhood." Online diaries proliferated during recent pandemic lockdowns. Some of these were spontaneous and others were solicited and collected by scholarly organizations such as the Centre for Life Writing at Oxford and the Mass Observation Project at the University of Sussex. Henderson's text likewise draws examples from far and wide, including a course syllabus on life writing at the University of Texas at Arlington, and she cites diaries written in diverse cultures (including Iraqi, Vietnamese, French, Polish, Japanese, American, and Canadian diaries) and diaries written from diverse perspectives from the sixteenth century to the present with the most recent online examples. In short, Henderson's how-to text is a springboard for many kinds of discussions and projects, a useful starting point for researchers and students, effectively and wisely packaged but covering a wide array of topics that all fit in that elusive but intriguing category of the "diary."

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Kathryn Carter is a professor of English at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, who focuses on diary writing. Her recent publications examine the history of feminist scholarship and diary writing in the collection *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life* (Indiana UP, 2020), edited by Batsheva Ben-Amos and Dan Ben-Amos, and how nineteenth-century account book diaries and photography are both concerned with industrialized standards of time in the journal *Life Writing*. She also edited an anthology of diary writing by women in Canada, *The Small Details of Life: Twenty Diaries by Women in Canada, 1830–1996* (U of Toronto P, 2002).

Different Lives: Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies

Hans Renders and David Veltman, editors

Brill, Biography Studies, vol. 1, 2020, xv + 278 pp. ISBN 9789004428126, $159.00 hardcover

This collection of varied and informative essays inaugurates Brill's new Biography Studies series, the stated aim of which is to answer current demand for "a theorization of biography as an emerging field, at a crossroads between several disciplines in the humanities" ("Biography Studies"). Hans Renders as coeditor of the volume is also editor-in-chief of the series; all members of the editorial board contribute essays to the volume. The volume addresses perennial and emerging questions in

biography research with reference to fourteen different national contexts; given the volume's claim to global reach, it is worth listing these in full. One essay each is devoted to the state of the art of biography in Canada, South Africa, Belgium, Spain, Australia, Italy, Iran, New Zealand, Iceland, the Czech Republic, Denmark, and the Netherlands; two essays discuss biography in China, and two the United States. Following a short introduction by Richard Holmes, an opening essay by Renders offers wider-ranging reflections on the genre and practice of biography and the disciplinary consolidation of biography studies, transcending any single national context.

Through its structure, the collection raises the question of how a transnational perspective on a single object of enquiry—in this case, the theory and practice of biography—can best be attained. The selective transnational presentation of a genre or practice that can reasonably claim universal, or near-universal, relevance across cultural boundaries and historical periods will inevitably be arbitrary to some degree. Why Iran and not India, for example, or why Czech biography and not Russian, Polish, or Brazilian for that matter? How deliberate is the salience of the Anglosphere and (post-)Commonwealth, with essays on New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and South Africa, as well as the two on the US? As the editors make no claim to comprehensive global coverage, it may seem churlish to query distribution and coverage in this way. Whatever one thinks of the world map drawn here, Renders and Veltman are to be credited with returning us to the abiding challenge of how to balance focus, diversity, and representativeness in any purportedly global account of a genre or discipline.

The significant proportion of anglophone material in this nevertheless diverse collection is presumably a function of the cherished place of biography in English letters since Samuel Johnson. Moreover, the genre's apparent "resistance to theory" made for a good fit with a common-sense pragmatism immune to the wilder flights of Continental (European) theory in the latter half of the twentieth century.[1] Several of the accounts of non-anglophone, non-Western, or postcolonial biography are framed by a narrative of "belatedness": a normative standard is supposed, compared with which other national traditions of biography are viewed as underdeveloped or restricted, and moves to "catch up" are welcomed and celebrated. Iranian, Czech, and—to a lesser extent—Chinese biography are characterized as lagging or having lagged behind, hamstrung at various periods (including the present) by government censorship, ideological pressure, constraints on access to sources, or other cultural-historical factors.[2] The very real challenges faced by biographers under repressive regimes remind us of modern biography's fundamentally democratic commitments: its countering of hagiography, its reliance on verifiability, its attempt to make transparent the relationships between private life and public action.

In contrast with the "belatedness" narratives, perspectives offered on national traditions such as the Italian, Danish, or Icelandic remind us of biography's embeddedness in specific cultural contexts and projects of nation-building. In Iceland, for instance, the early literacy of peasants and the development of a distinctive scribal

culture gave rise to a popular biographical practice centered around particular vocations (priests, teachers) and localities. Readers (including this one) unfamiliar with Iceland's language and culture will appreciate the deft contextualization of recent more experimental forms against the backdrop of a public discourse in which memorial culture is closely entwined with questions of genealogy.[3] Several contributions identify key protagonists and periods in biography's contribution to the emergence of the modern nation (Gauchon on Italian biography during the Risorgimento, Cymbrykiewicz on Danish biography, Markupová on Czech biography in the early twentieth century). The centrality of the nation-building question in many of the essays is productively at odds with the volume's overall claim to offer "global perspectives." The intricate relationship between biographical practice and national context that is apparent in these accounts suggests that biography itself may be considered a national institution of sorts, even beyond the obvious cases of dictionaries of national biography—rightly termed "conservative projects" by Jana Wohlmuth Markupová (192), a choice of phrasing that reminds us of the full semantic spectrum of the adjective in question. What remains underexplored is biography's potential to disrupt a national orientation, to create transnational connections, and to reflect postnational and globalized realities.

The methodological problem of how diverse national traditions and contexts can be framed within a purportedly global account of biography may remain unresolved, but this does not detract from the value of the individual contributions, or prevent an implicit dialogue from arising between them. Daniel Meister's scrupulously researched essay on the publishing contexts of biography in Canada quotes historian Michael Gauvreau: "the standard of successful biography remains the full elucidation and presentation of the subject's self-understanding in the context of his or her society and culture" (35). Readers less inclined towards the elusive goals of "full elucidation" and "self-understanding" may find themselves drawn more towards the roving, untameable pleasures and provocations of life traces and narratives, and the endlessly askable question of what these can signify to those who come after. Like biography itself, scholarship on biography is perhaps most illuminating and enjoyable where it eschews the will to generalize and offers instead the "creative fact" (Woolf 123), the unruly anecdote, the nugget or concrete instance that suddenly shouts to the reader across time, space, and difference, puncturing the obscurity of that remote other country, the past. Readers encountering the Chinese grand court historian Sima Qian (d. 86 BCE) for the first time in these pages are unlikely to forget his vivid description of the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi (qtd. in Brown 86); the accounts of Czech samizdat and exile biographers working with limited access to sources and resources enliven our sense of the arduous path biography is sometimes forced to take. Wider intellectual questions around relationships between biography and microhistory, or around biography as a nexus of philosophical traffic between personalism, existentialism, and psychoanalytic theories of individuation, are helpfully grounded in specific cultural-historical contexts (in particular, Gouchan and Magnússon on microhistory, Cymbrykiewicz on individuation, and Markupová on personalism). Carl Rollyson's discussion of

presidential biography in the United States revisits the temptations to fiction that can land biographers in a "category error" (110).

True to the series goal of furnishing a "theorization of biography," the volume raises the question of how we read—of the political and aesthetic investments we make as readers of biography. What counts as a "successful biography" to one reader may seem mired in Carlylean fallacies to another. The hope expressed by Renders that biography be "devoid of ideology" (7) is countered in many of these essays, particularly those touching on questions of gender, race, and power, by the hope that biographers become more conscious of their own ideological alignments. At a time when the long overdue decolonization of memory cultures and historiographical practice is gaining traction, biography's potential and actual contribution to the urgent work of exposing slow violence, recovering marginalized voices, and disrupting hegemonic epistemologies becomes especially pertinent: Koorts's essay on biography in post-apartheid South Africa makes clear how difficult and controversial such work can be. Doug Munro explores the post-settler's double bind—"an earlier criticism was that Pakeha authors neglected Maori; now the point at issue was that Pakeha should not be appropriating and misrepresenting Maori history" (156)—highlighting the long and unfinished journey of a decolonizing historiography towards its own golden rule of "nothing about us without us." As biographers will always veer close to ventriloquism in their "desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt 1), they are particularly well-equipped to navigate the choppy waters that lie between the recovery of lost histories and cultural appropriation. As Munro notes, biography joins other historiographical forms and venues, including conferences, in moving these often "fraught" dialogues forward (156–57).

Through its welcome diversification of perspectives, the volume as a whole releases critical energies that exceed its own account of the politics of biography. Occasional contradictions result. Renders opens with an overview of recent processes of disciplinary consolidation of biography studies in the Netherlands, defining biography as "an overarching field of study . . . that includes life writing" (6). Elsewhere, we find the caricature of "Life Writing," familiar from Renders' recent work, particularly his *ABC of Modern Biography* with Nigel Hamilton, as the post-truth soapbox of the aggrieved woke. Hamilton's essay, laying the ills of the Trump era at the door of "the pdp drug" (poststructuralism, deconstruction, postmodernism), recapitulates these arguments. It is a relief to see that Elsbeth Etty softens the false antagonism between biography and life writing in her account of Dutch biography. Unfortunately, Etty does not adhere to her own high, "scholarly sound" standards when it comes to citing Virginia Woolf. Yet again, Woolf's notion of "creative fact" is misread here, and the bald claim that "Woolf believed that to capture someone's essence, the biographer needs fiction as well as facts" (216) is not only devoid of a footnote,[4] it also dissolves in the face of an attentive reading of Woolf's seminal essays on biography, which are concerned precisely with the incompatibility of fiction and fact in biographical narratives. As for the "scholarly sound" tag (208–16), presumably intended as part of the artillery of disciplinary self-validation for biography studies, alas, it labors under its own grammatical dubiousness

(one longs for a comma, but then begins to suspect that the first of the two adjectives has been mistaken for an adverb). The confusion is compounded by Etty's claim that Renders's wise if uncontroversial advice to biographers—"Everything should be attributable to sources"—refers not just to the facts but also to "the interpretation of those facts" (214). To what kind of sources biographers should attribute their interpretative efforts is unclear: the need for an adequate hermeneutics of biography to break the self-perpetuating cycle of the "fact versus fiction" debate becomes apparent.

Future studies of the "different lives" of biography in a global context will be able to build on the insights found in this volume to provide more systematic investigation of Indigenous and postcolonial biography on a methodologically transnational basis, rather than on the implicitly comparative basis offered here, which continues to treat Indigenous and postcolonial perspectives as a subset of the national history. In this tension between its structure (along national lines) and the diversity to which it bears witness (of positions within or beyond, and often uncomfortable relationships to, the institutions of the nation, biography among them), the volume raises the possibility of a postnational framing of biography that could establish whether the global context is transformative of the national, or merely the sum of its various parts. Hamilton's timely warning that biography "won't survive an environmental apocalypse" (19), and his heartfelt plea for the democratic, evidence-based value of biography in an age of digitally fueled misinformation also suggests a possible direction for future volumes in this series: whither biography in an age of ecocide?

Given the linguistic and cultural range of the volume, readers will appreciate the translations of titles from other languages, although these are not consistently provided. The quality of the copyediting is also inconsistent, with the excellent essay on Chinese biography by Kerry Brown beset by frequent typographical errors, and unidiomatic phrasing fairly frequent elsewhere. Lindie Koorts, whose account of biography in post-apartheid South Africa is one of the most gripping essays in the collection, is absent from the "Notes on Contributors."[5] The bibliography, running to thirty pages with titles in a wide range of languages from Icelandic to Chinese, will be a valuable resource for future scholarship in the field of global and transnational biography studies. *Different Lives* is a worthy opening to a series that promises to advance understanding of the cultural, political, and aesthetic stakes of biography, within and beyond national contexts: researchers in biography will eagerly await future volumes in the series.

Notes

1. Ray Monk's essay "Life After Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding," which explores these questions, is cited by several of the contributors.
2. See Nolan on Australian biography in *Different Lives* (114).

3. See Magnússon on Matthías Vidar Sæmunðsson's biography of Héðinn Valdimarsson (180).
4. The reference is presumably to Virginia Woolf's "The New Biography": "[Harold Nicolson] has shown that a little fiction mixed with fact can be made to transmit personality very effectively" (99–100). The passage concludes: "Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction: the imagination will not serve two masters simultaneously. . . . Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible . . . the mixture of the two is abhorrent." Woolf's earlier essay, "The Art of Biography," reaches similar conclusions in the discussion of Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex*.
5. *The Conversation* lists her as a postdoctoral fellow in History at the University of the Free State ("Lindie Koorts").

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The ABC of Modern Biography

Nigel Hamilton and Hans Renders

Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 250 pp. ISBN 9789462988712, $35.00 hardcover.

The alphabet provides an arbitrary arrangement of groups of people or things, based on the contingencies of a specific writing system. As such, it offers a neutral organizational basis for registers, reference works, and ballot papers. When applied to larger discursive projects that aspire to some degree of conceptual unity, the ABC format suggests the character of a primer or introduction to the subject. As a structuring device, ABC is also a knowing nod to the irreconcilable tensions