

Chapter - 2

Biography as Fiction

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The most obvious reason behind the existence of a work of art is its creator, the author; and hence an explanation in terms of the personality and life of the writer has been one of the oldest and best-established methods of literary study. Biography can be judged in relation to the light it throws on the actual production of poetry; but we can, also defend and justify it as a study of the man of genius, of his moral, intellectual and emotional development, which has its own intrinsic interest; and finally, we can think of biography as affording material for a systematic study of the psychology of the writer. These three points of view should be carefully distinguished. For our conception of 'literary scholarship' only the first thesis, that biography explains and illuminates the actual product of poetry, is directly relevant. The second point of view, shifts the centre of attention to human personality. The third considers biography as material for a science or future science, the psychology of artistic creation.

Biography is an ancient literary genre. First of all chronologically and logically - it is a part of historiography. Biography makes no methodological distinction between a

statesman, a general, an architect, a lawyer and a man who plays no public role. And Coleridge's view that "any life, however insignificant would, if truthfully told, be of interest is sound enough." In the view of a biographer, the writer is simply another man whose moral and intellectual development, external career and emotional life, can be reconstructed and can be evaluated by reference to standards, usually drawn from some ethical system or code of manners. His writings may appear as mere facts of publications, as events like those in the life of any active man. So viewed, the problems of a biography are simply those of a historian. Somerset Maugham once said, "Familiarity with the life of an author enriches the experiences of reading his or her work." (1)

He has to interpret his documents, letters, accounts by eye-witnesses, reminiscences, auto-biographical statements, and to decide questions of genuineness, trustworthiness of witnesses, and the like. In the actual writing of biography he encounters problems of chronological presentation, of selection, of discretion or frankness. The rather extensive work which has been done on biography as a genre deals with such questions, questions in no way specially literary. In our context two questions of literary biography are crucial. How far is the biographer justified in using the evidence of the works themselves for his purpose.

How far are the results of literary biography relevant and important for an understanding of the works themselves. An affirmative answer to both questions is usually given. To the first question it is assumed by practically all biographers who are specifically attracted to poets, for poets appear to offer abundant evidence usable in the writing of a biography which will be absent or almost absent, in the case of many of the more influential historical personages. We must distinguish two ages of man, two possible solutions. For

most early literature we have no private documents which a biographer can draw upon. We have only a series of public documents, birth register, marriage certificates, lawsuits, and the like, and then the evidence of the works.

We can, for example, trace Shakespeare's movements very roughly, and we know something of his finances; but we have absolutely nothing in the form of letters, diaries, reminiscences, except of a few anecdotes of doubtful authenticity. The vast effort which has been extended upon the study of Shakespeare's life has yielded only few results of literary profit. They are chiefly facts of chronology and illustrations of the social status and the associations of Shakespeare.

Hence those who have tried to construct an actual biography of Shakespeare, of his ethical and emotional development, have either arrived, if they went about it in a scientific spirit, as Caroline Spurgeon attempted in her study of Shakespeare's imagery, at a mere list of trivialities, or if they used the plays and sonnets recklessly, have constructed biographical romances like those of Georg Brandes or Frank Harris. The whole assumption behind these attempts which began probably with a few hints in Hazlitt and Schlegel, elaborated first, rather cautiously, by Dowden is quite mistaken. One cannot, from fictional statements, especially those made in plays, draw any valid inference as to the biography of a writer. One may gravely doubt even the usual view that Shakespeare passed through a period of depression, in which he wrote his tragedies and his bitter comedies, to achieve some serenity of resolution in *The Tempest*.

It is not self-evident that a writer needs to be in a tragic mood to write tragedies or that he writes comedies when he feels pleased with life. There is simply no proof for the sorrows of Shakespeare. He cannot be held responsible for the views of Timon or Macbeth

or like, just as he cannot be considered to hold the views of Doll Tearsheet or Iago. There is no reason to believe that Prospero speaks like Shakespeare ; authors cannot be assigned the ideas feelings, views, virtues, and vices of their heroes. And this is true not only of dramatic characters or characters in a novel but also of the I of the lyrical poem. The relation between the private life and the work is not a simple relation of cause and effect.

Proponents of the biographical method will, however, object to these contentions. Conditions, they will say, have changed since the time of Shakespeare. Biographical evidence has, for many poets, become abundant because the poets have become self-conscious, have thought of themselves as living in the eyes of posterity (like Milton, Pope, Goethe, Wordsworth or Byron) and have left many autobiographical statements as well as attracted much contemporary attention. The biographical approach now seems easy, for we can check life and work against each other. Indeed, the approach is even invited and demanded by the poet, especially the Romantic poet, who writes about himself and his innermost feelings or even like Byron, carries the 'pageant of his bleeding heart' around Europe. These poets spoke of themselves not only in private letters, diaries, and autobiographies, but also in their most formal pronouncements. Wordsworth's *Prelude* is a declared autobiography . It seems difficult not to take these pronouncements, sometimes not difficult in content or even in tone from their private correspondence, at their face value without interpreting poetry in terms of the poet, who saw it himself, in Goethe's well-known phrase , as 'fragments of great confession.'

We should certainly distinguish two types of poets, the objective and the subjective: those who, like Keats and T.S. Eliot, stress the poet's 'negative capability', his openness to the world, the obliteration of his concrete personality, and the opposite type of

the poet, who aims at displaying his personality, wants to draw a self-portrait, to confess, to express himself. For long stretches of history we know only the first type: the works in which the element of personal expression is very weak, even though the aesthetic value may be great. The Italian novelle, Chivalric romances, the sonnets of the Renaissance, Elizabethan drama, naturalistic novels, most folk poetry, may serve as literary examples. But, even with the subjective poet, the distinction between a personal statement of an autobiographical nature and the use of the very same motif in a work of art should not and cannot be withdrawn. A work of art forms a unity on quite a different plane, with a different relation to reality, than a book of memories, a diary, or a letter. Only by a perversion of the biographical method could the most intimate and frequently the most casual study of the actual poems be interpreted in the light of the documents and arranged accordingly to a scale entirely separate from or even contradictory to that provided by any critical judgment of the poems. Thus Brandes slights Macbeth as uninteresting because it is least related to what he conceives to be Shakespeare's personality; thus Kingsmill's complaint of Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* too is in the same tone. Even when a work of art contains elements which can be surely identified as biographical, these elements will be so arranged or transformed in a work that they would lose all their specifically personal meaning and become simply concrete human material, integral elements of a work rather than the writer.

The whole view that art is self-expression pure and simple, the transcript of personal feelings and experiences, is demonstrably false. Even when there is a close relationship between the work of art and the life of an author, this must never be constructed to mean that the work of art is a mere copy of life. The biographical approach

forgets that a work of art is not simply the embodiment of an experience. It is rather the latest work in a series of such works; it is a drama, a novel, a poem determined, so far as it is determined at all, by literary tradition and convention. The biographical approach actually obscures a proper comprehension of the literary process, since it breaks up the order of literary tradition to substitute the life-cycle of an individual. The biographical approach ignores even the also quite simple psychological facts. A work of art may rather embody the 'dream' of an author than his actual life, or it may be the 'mask', the 'anti-self' behind which his real person is hiding, or it may be a picture of the life from which the author wants to escape. Further more, we must not forget that the artist may 'experience' life differently in terms of his art: actual experiences are seen with a view to their use in literature and come to him already partially shaped by artistic traditions and preconceptions.

Biographical interpretation and use of every work of art needs careful scrutiny and examination in each case, since the work of art is not a document for biography. Wade's *Life of Traherne* takes every statement of his poems as literal biographical truth. Many books about the lives of the Brontës which have simply passages from *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*. There is *The Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë by Virginia Moore*, who thinks that Emily must have experienced the passions of Heathcliff; and there are others who have argued that a woman could not have written *Wuthering Heights* and that the brother, Patrick, must have been the real author. This is the group who argues that Shakespeare must have visited Italy, must have been a lawyer, a soldier, a teacher, a farmer. Ellen Terry gave the crushing reply to all this when she argued that, by the same criteria, Shakespeare must have been a woman. But, it will be said, such instances of

pretentious folly do not dispose of the problem of personality in literature. While reading Dante, Goethe or Tolstoy we know that there is a person behind the work.

There is an indubitable physiognomic similarity between the writings of one author. The question might be asked, however, whether it would not be better to distinguish sharply between the empirical person and the work, which can be called 'personal' only in a metaphorical sense. There is a quality which we may call 'Miltonic' or 'Keatsian' in the work of the authors. But this quality can be determined on the basis of the works themselves, while it may not be ascertainable upon purely biographical evidence. We know what is 'Virgilian' or 'Shakespearian' without having any really definite biographical knowledge of the two great poets.

Still, there are connecting links, parallelisms, oblique resemblances. The poet's work may be a mask, a dramatized conventionalization, but it is frequently a conventionalization of his own experiences, his own life. If used with a sense of these distinctions, there is use in biographical study. First, no doubt, it has exegetical value: it may explain a great many allusions or even words in an author's work. The biographical framework can be helpful in studying the most obvious developmental problems in the history of literature - the growth, maturing, and possible decline of an author's art. Biography also accumulates the materials for other questions of literary history such as the reading of the poet, his personal associations with literary men, his travels, the landscapes and cities he saw and lived in: all these questions may throw light on literary history, i.e. the tradition in which the poem was placed, his formative influences and the materials on which he drew.

No biographical evidence can however change or influence critical evaluation. The frequently adduced criterion of 'sincerity' is thoroughly false if it judges literature in terms of biographical truthfulness, and its correspondence to the author's experiences or feelings as they are attested by outside evidence. There is no relation between sincerity and value as art. Byron's 'Fare Thee Well... ' is neither a worse nor a better poem because it dramatizes the poet's actual relations with his wife. The poem exists; the tears shed or unshed, the personal emotions, are gone and cannot be reconstructed, nor do they need to be .

By 'biography as Fiction' we may mean the psychological study of the writer, as type and as individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature , or, finally, the effects of literature upon its readers. The poet is the 'possessed': he is unlike other men , at once less and more; and the unconscious out of which he speaks is felt to be at once sub and super - rational.

The Muse took away the sight of Demodocus's eyes but 'gave him the lovely gift of song' , as the blinded Tiresias is given prophetic 'vision. Handicap and endowment are not always, of course, so directly correlative; and the malady or deformity may be psychological or social instead of physical. Pope was a hunchback and a dwarf; Byron had a club foot; Proust was an asthmatic and partly neurotic ; Keats was shorter than other men. After the event, any success can be attributed to compensatory motivation, for everyone has liabilities which may serve as spurs.

According to Freud ,

The artist is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in phantasy- life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts, he moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them as a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favourite he desired to be without circuitous path of creating real alteration in the outer world. (The Art of Literature 76)

There is a distinction to be made between the mental structure of a poet and the composition of a poem, between impression and expression. The painter sees as a painter; the painting is the clarification and a completion of his seeing. The poet is a maker of poems; but the matter of his poems is completely his perception of life in which creative habits, as well as stimulants and rituals play significant role. Alcohol, opium and other drugs dull the conscious mind, the over-critical 'censor' and release the activity of the subconscious. Coleridge and De Quincey made a more grandiose claim that through opium, a whole new world of experience was opened. Different writers like to write in a special different kind of atmosphere. Schiller kept rotten apples in his desk; Balzac wrote in the robes of a monk. Some require silence or solitude; but other authors assert that they can write only in certain seasons, as did Milton.

How far these transcriptional modes affect the literary style. Hemingway thinks that the typewriter solidifies one's sentences before they are ready to print while others think that the instrument is just for journalistic style. Any modern treatment of the creative process will chiefly concern the relative roles played by the unconscious and the conscious mind. The authors most given to discussing their art wish naturally to discuss their conscious and technical procedures. The literary man is a specialist in association, dissociation and re-combination. He uses words as his medium. For the poet, the word is not primarily a 'sign', a transparent counter, but a 'symbol', valuable for itself as well as in its capacity of a representative, it may even be an 'object' or a 'thing'.

The creation of characters may be supposed to blend, in varying degrees, inherited literary types, persons observed, and the self. 'One man's mood is another man's character' the more humorous and separate his characters, the less defined his own 'personality' would seem. Whether the author has really succeeded in incorporating psychology into his figures. Mere statements of his knowledge or theories would not count. They would be 'matter' or 'content' like any other type of information to be found in literature e.g. facts from navigation, astronomy, or history. The attempts to fit Hamlet or Jaques into some scheme of Elizabethan Psychology seem mistaken, because Elizabethan Psychology was contradictory, confusing and confused and Hamlet and Jaques are more than types. In some cases, psychological insight seems to enhance the artistic value. For some conscious artists, psychology may have tightened their sense of reality, sharpened their powers of observation; and in the work itself, psychological truth is of artistic value only if it enhances coherence and complexity.

Fiction is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. Such traditional literary devices as symbolism and meter are social in their very nature. They are conventions and norms which could have arisen only in society. But, furthermore, fiction represents life and life is in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation. The writer himself is a member of society, possessed of a specific social status; he received some degree of social recognition and reward; he addressed an audience. Fiction has usually arisen in close connection with particular social institutions.

The relation between fiction and society is usually discussed by starting with the phrase, derived from De Bonald, that 'Fiction is an expression of society'. Since every writer is a member of society, he can be studied as a social being. Though his biography is the main source, such a study can easily widen into one of the whole milieu from which he came and in which he lived. It will be possible to accumulate information about the social provenance, the family background, the economic position of writers.

In modern Europe, fiction recruited its practitioners largely from the middle classes, since aristocracy was preoccupied with the pursuit of glory or leisure while the lower classes had little opportunity for education. In England, this generation holds good only with large reservations. The sons of peasants and workmen appear only infrequently in older English literature: exceptions in the works of Burns and Carlyle can be explained by reference to the democratic Scottish School system. The role of the aristocracy in English literature was uncommonly great - partly because it was less cut off from the professional classes than in other countries. All modern Russian writers were aristocratic in origin with a few exceptions.

The cases of Shelley, Carlyle and Tolstoy are obvious examples of such 'treason' to one's class. Outside of Russia, most communist writers are not protective in origin. The social origins of a writer play only a minor part in the questions raised by his social status, allegiance and ideology; for writers, it is clear, have often put themselves at the service of another class. Most court poetry was written by men, who, though born in lower estate, adopted the ideology and taste of their patrons. The social allegiance, attitude and ideology of a writer can be studied not only in his writings but also, frequently, in biographical extra-literary documents.

The writer has been a citizen, has pronounced on questions of social and political importance, has taken part in the issues of his time. Much work has been done upon political and social views of individual writers, and in recent times more and more attention has been devoted to the economic implications of these views. Ben Jonson's economic attitude was profoundly medieval, shows how, like several of his fellow dramatists, he satirized the rising class of usurers, monopolists, speculators, and 'undertakers'. Many works of literature - e.g. the 'histories' of Shakespeare and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* have been reinterpreted in close relation to the political context of the time. Pronouncements, decisions, and activities should never be confused with the actual social implications of a writer's works.

The problems of social origins, allegiance, and ideology will, if systematized, lead to a sociology of the writer as a type, or as a type at a particular time and place. We can distinguish between writers according to their degree of integration into the social process. The writer is not only influenced by society; he also influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it. People may model their lives upon the patterns of

fictional heroes and heroines. They have made love, committed crimes and attempted suicide according to the book. The most common approach to the relations of literature and society is the study of works of literature as social documents, as assumed pictures of social reality. The relation between fiction and ideas can be conceived in very diverse ways. Frequently literature is thought of as a form of philosophy, as 'ideas' wrapped in form; and it is analyzed to yield 'leading ideas'. Fiction can be treated as a document in the history of ideas and philosophy, for literary history parallels and reflects intellectual history.

The close integration between philosophy and literature is frequently deceptive. Arguments in its favour are overrated because they are based on a study of literary ideology, professions of intentions and certain programmes which, necessarily borrowing from existing aesthetic formulations, may sustain only remote relationship to the actual practice of the artists. The assumption of a common social background may really be deceptive. Philosophy has frequently been cultivated by a special class which may be very different from the practitioners of poetry, both in social affiliations and provenance. Philosophy, much more than literature, has been identified with the Church and the Academy.

Philosophy, with its ideological content, and in its proper context, can enhance artistic value because it collaborates several important artistic values like complexity and coherence. A theoretical insight may increase the artist's depth of penetration and scope of reach. The artist will be hampered by too much ideology if it remains unassimilated. Sometimes in the history of literature however there are cases, when ideas take a concrete form, when figures and scenes not merely represent but actually embody ideas, when

some identification of philosophy and art seems to take place. Image becomes concept and concept becomes Image.

The earliest biographical writings probably were funeral speeches and inscriptions. The origin of modern biography can be traced to Plutarch's moralizing lives of prominent Greeks and Romans. Few biographies of common individuals were written until the 16th century. The major developments of English biography come in the 18th century, with such works as James Boswell's *life of Johnson*. In modern times impatience with Victorian reticence and the development of psychoanalysis have led to a more penetrating and comprehensive understanding of biographical subjects.

When Fiction was presented as biography, it was a brilliant success. But these do not masquerade as lives, rather, they imaginatively take the place of biography where there can be no genuine writing about a life writing for lack of materials. Among the highly regarded examples of this genre are, in the guise of auto biography, Robert Graves's books on the Roman emperor Claudius and Claudius the God and his Wife Messalina, Mary Renault's *the king must Die* on the legendary hero Theseus, and Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian*. Some novels using fictional names, are designed to evoke rather than re-create an actual life, such as Somerset Maugham's *Moon* and Robert Penn Warren's *All the king's Men*.

There exists a large class of works that might be labelled as "special-purpose" biography which has become the servant of other interests. They include potboilers (Written as propaganda or as a scandalous expose) and "as-told-to" to publicize a celebrity. The category includes also "campaign biographies" aimed to work for or against a political

candidate, pious works that are properly called hagiography, or lives of holy men, written to edify the reader.

Informal autobiography manifests a wide variety of forms, beginning with the intimate writings made during a life that were not intended for publication. Whatever its form or time, autobiography has helped define a nation's citizens and political ambitions. The form is crucial to not only to show how an individual meets the challenge of stating "I am" but also how a nation and a historical period does so.

Letters, diaries and journals represent a series of increasingly self-conscious revelation. Collected letters, especially in edited modern editions such as W.S. Hewish's the correspondences of the 18th-century man of letters Horace Walpole can offer a rewarding though not always predictable experience: some eminent people commit little of themselves to paper, while other lesser figures pungently re-create themselves and their world. The 15th-century Pastoral letters constitute an invaluable Chronicle of the web of daily life woven by a tough and vigorous English family among the East-Anglican gentry during the wars of the Roses. Mozart and the poet Byron, in quite different ways, are among the most revealing of letter writers.

Memoirs and reminiscences are autobiographies that usually emphasize what is remembered rather than who is remembering, the author, instead of recounting his life, deals with those experience of his life, people, and events that he considers most significant.

Formal autobiography offers a special kind of biographical truth: a life, reshaped by recollection, with all of recollection's conscious and unconscious omissions and distortions.

The novelist Graham Greene says that, an autobiography is only "a sort of life" and uses the phrase as the title for his autobiography. Any such work is a true picture of what, at one moment in a life wished or is impelled to reveal that life. An event recorded in the autobiographer's youthful journal is likely to be somewhat different from that same event recollected in later years.

There are a few and scattered examples of autobiographical literature in antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the 2nd century b.c. the Chinese classical historian Siam Quran included a brief account of himself in the "Historian Records". It is stretching a point to include, from the 1st century b.c, the letters of Cicero and Julius Caesar's commentaries tell little about Caesar, though they present a masterly picture of the conquest of Gaul and the operations of the Roman military machine at its most efficient. The confessions of St. Augustine, of the 5th century, belong to a special category of autobiography. The 14th century letter to posterity of the Italian poet Petrarch is but a brief excursion in the field.

The first full - scale formal autobiography was written a generation later by a celebrated humanist publicist of the age, Enema Silvia Piccolo mini, after he was elevated to the papacy, in 1458, as Pius II- the result of an election that he recounts with astonishing frankness spiced with malice.

Specialized forms of autobiography might be grouped under four heads: the matric, religious, intellectual and fictionalized. The first grouping includes books with such diverse purposes as Adolf Hitler's *Main Kemp* (1924), *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (1920). and Richer Wright's *Native son* (1940). Religious autobiography claims a number of great works, ranging from the *Confessions of St- Augustine* and Peter Abelard's *Historic Calamitous* in the Middle Ages to the autobiographical chapters of Thomas Carlyle's

Sartor Resartus and John Henry Cardinal Newman's *Beautifully wrought Apologia* in the 19th century.

In the western world, biographical literature can be said to begin in the 5th century b.c. with the poet Ion of Chios, who wrote brief sketches of such famous contemporaries as Pericles and Sophocles. It continued throughout the classical period for a thousand years, until the dissolution of the Roman Empire in the 5th century.

The first half of this period exhibits a considerable amount of biographical activity, of which much has been lost, such fragments as remain are largely funeral elegies and rhetorical exercises depicting ideal types of character or behavior and suggest that from a literary point of view the loss is not grievous. Biographical works of the last centuries in the classical period, characterized by numerous sycophantic accounts of emperors share the declining energies of the other literary arts. But although there are few genuine examples of life writing, in the modern sense of the term, these few are master pieces.

The two greatest teachers of the classical Mediterranean world, Socrates and Jesus Christ, both prompted the creation of magnificent biographies written by their followers. The same century, the first of the Christian era, gave birth to the first truly "professional" biographers- Plutarch and Suetonius. The revolution brought about by the growth of Christianity is signalled in a specialized autobiography *the Confession of St. Augustine*; but the biographical opportunity suggested by Christian emphasis on the individual soul was, oddly, not to be realized. The demands of the Church and the spiritual needs of men in a twilight world of superstition and violence transformed biography into hagiography. There followed a thousand years of saint's lives and the art of biography was forced to serve ends other than its own.

Middle Ages was a period of biographical darkness, an age dominated by the priest and the Knight. The priest shaped biography into an exemplum of other-worldliness, while the knight found escape from daily brutishness in allegory, Chivalric romances, and a brood of the saints' lives, like Eadmer's *life of Anselm*, contain anecdotal materials that give some human flavours to their subjects, like the 13th-century French nobleman Jean, sire de Joinville's life of St. Louis.

Most remarkable, a self-consciously wrought work of biography came into being in the 9th century: this was *the life of Charlemagne*, written by a cleric at his court named Einhard. He is aware of his biographical obligations and sets forth his point of view and his motives, "I have been careful not to omit any facts that could come to my knowledge, but at the same time not to offend by a prolix style those minds that despise everything modern..... No man can write with more accuracy than I of events that took place about me, and of facts concerning which I had personal knowledge."

Biography stirs into fresh life with the Renaissance in the 15th century. Biography was chiefly limited to uninspired panegyrics of Italian princes by their court humanist, such as Simoneton's *life of the great condottiere*, Francesco Sforza, duke of Milan.

During the first part of the 16th century the English now stimulated by the "new learning" of Erasmus, John Colet, Thomas More and others, there wrote three works that can be regarded as the initiators of modern biography: More's *History of Richard III*, William Roper's *Mirrors of Virtue in Wardle Greatness; the life of Cardinal Wales*; *The history of Richard III* unfortunately remains unfinished and it cannot meet the strict standards of biographical truth since, under the influence of classical historians, a third of the book consists of dialogue that is not recorded from life. However, it is a brilliant work,

exuberant with wit and irony, that not only constitutes a biographical landmark but is also the first piece of modern English prose.

In the 17th century the word biography was first employed to create a separate identity for this type of writing. That century and the first half of the 18th presents a busy and sometimes bizarre biographical landscape. It was an era of experimentation and preparation rather than of successful achievement. In the new world, the American colonies began to develop a scattered biographical activity, none of it of lasting importance.

The last half of the 18th century witnessed the remarkable association of two remarkable men, from which sprang what is generally agreed to be the world's supreme biography, Boswell's *life of Samuel Johnson*. Dr. Johnson, literary dictator of his age, critic and lexicographer who turned his hand to many kinds of literature, himself, created the first English professional biographies in the *Lives of English poets*. In essays and in conversation, Johnson set forth principles for biographical composition: the writer must tell the truth “ the business of the biographer is often to..... display the minute details that re-create a living character; and men need not be of exalted fame to provide worthy subjects.”

The life of Johnson may be regarded as a representative psychological expression of the Age of Enlightenment, and it certainly epitomizes several typical characteristics of that age: devotion to urban life in common sense, emphasis on man as a social being. Yet in its extravagant pursuit of the life of one individual, in its laying bare the eccentricities and suggesting the inner turmoil of personality, it may be thought of as a part of the

revolution in self-awareness, ideas, aspirations, exemplified in Rousseau's *confessions*, the French Revolution.

The period of modern biography was ushered in, generally speaking, by world war I. All the arts were in ferment, and biographical literature against 19th century conventions, partly as a response to advances in psychology, and partly as a search for new means of expression. The revolution, unlike that at the end of the 18th century, was eventually destined to enlarge and enhance the stature of biography. The chief developments of modern life writing may be conveniently classified under five heads: an increase in the number and general competence of biographies throughout the western world, the influence on biographical literature of the counter forces of science and fictional writing, the decline of formal autobiography and of biographies springing from a personal relationship, the range and variety of biographical expression and the steady, though moderate, growth of a literature of biographical criticism.

Little has been said about biography since the renaissance in Germany, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia and the Slavic countries. In Russia, there had been comparatively little biographical literature and because biographical trends, particularly since the end of the 18th century, generally followed those of Britain and France. Russian literary genius in prose is best exemplified during both the 19th and 20th centuries in the novel. In the 19th century, However, Leo Tolstoy's numerous autobiographical writings, such as *childhood and Boyhood*, and Sergey Aksakov's *Years of childhood* and *A Russian Schoolboy*. Maxims Gorky's autobiographical trilogy (childhood; In the world and my Universities, 1913-23) represent, in specialized form, a limited biographical activity. The close control of literature exercised by the 20th century communist governments of Eastern Europe has

created a wintry climate for biography. The rest of Europe outside the iron curtain, has manifested in varying degrees the fresh biographical energies and practices illustrated in British-American life writing: biography is now, as never before, an international art that share an almost common viewpoint.

The second characteristic of modern biography is its being subject to the opposing pressures of science and fictional writing, has a dark as well as a bright side. Twentieth-century fiction, boldly and restlessly experimental, has on one hand, influenced the biographer to aim at literary excellence, to employ devices of fiction suitable for biographical ends, but, on the other, fiction has also probably encouraged the production of popular pseudo biography, hybrids of fact and fancy, as well as more subtle distortions of the art form. Science has exerted two quite different kinds of pressure: the prestige of the traditional science in its emphasis on exactitude and rigorous and an uncompromising scrutiny of evidences. But a vast accumulation of scientific facts has helped to create an atmosphere in which today's massive, note-ridden and fact-encumbered lives proliferate and has probably contributed indirectly to a reluctance in the scholarly community to take the risks inevitable in true biographical composition.

The particular science of psychology, as earlier pointed out, has conferred great benefits upon the responsible practitioners of biography. It has also accounted in large part, for the third characteristic of modern biography: the decline of formal autobiography and the grand tradition of biography resulting from a personal relationship. For psychology has rendered the self more exposed but also more elusive, more fascinatingly complex and, in the darker reaches, somewhat unpalatable. Since honesty would force the autobiographer into a self-examination both formidable to undertake and uncomfortable to publish, instead

he generally turns his attention to outward experiences and writes memoirs and reminiscences. France somehow offers something of an exception in the journals of such writers as Paul Valery and Julian Green.

Biography as an independent art form, with its concentration upon the individual life and its curiosity about the individual personality, is essentially a creation of the West. In Asia, for all its long literary heritage, even in Islam, biographical literature does not show any development, to assume the importance, of Western life writing. In India it is the enduring concern for spiritual values and for contemplation or mystical modes of existence that have exerted the deepest influence on literature from the 1st millennium b.c. to the present, and this has not provided a milieu suitable to biographical composition. Generally speaking, the literary history of Japan, too, offers only fragmentary or limited examples of life writing.

In the United States, Great Britain and the rest of the Western world, biography today enjoys a moderately popular but critical esteem. In the year 1929, at the height of the biographical boom there were published in the United States 667 new biographies; in 1962 exactly the same number appeared, the population in the meantime having increased by something like 50 percent.

Biographical drama has of course been staged even before the time of Shakespeare; it continues to be popular, whether translated from narrative to the theatre. The cinema often follows its versions of such plays; it likewise produces original biographical films, generally with indifferent success. Television, too, offers historical "re-creations" of various sorts, and with varying degrees of responsibility, but has achieved only a few notable examples of biographical illumination, the conflict between gripping visual

presentation and the often unromantic but important, biographical truth is difficult to resolve.

Biography, indeed, seems less innovative, less rewarding of experiment, and less adaptable to new media, than does fiction or perhaps even history. Words are no longer the only way to tell a story and perhaps in time will not be regarded as the chief way; but so far they seem the best way of unfolding the full course of a life and exploring the quirks and crannies of a personality. Anchored in the truth of fact, though seeking the truth of interpretation, biography tends to be more stable than other literary arts; and its future would appear to be predictably a steady evaluation of its present trends.

A natural conclusion follows that there is no such thing as absolute objectivity and that every text including biographical accounts should be considered as fiction since a certain degree of reconstruction as well as personal involvement is involved. Biography written as fiction or "biofiction" is a newly emerging genre in literary fiction. It captures the characterization, plot and protagonist in fascinating and readable ways. The term Fictional autobiography has been coined to define novels about a fictional character written as though the character were writing their own biography of which Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is an example. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is yet another example of fictional autobiography. The term autobiographical novel is difficult to define. Novels that portray settings and situation with which the author is familiar are not necessarily autobiographical. Neither are novels that include aspects drawn from the author's life as minor plot details. To be considered an autobiographical by most standards, there must be a protagonist modeled after the author and a central plotline that mirrors events in his or her life.

In Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* many elements within the novel follow events in Dickens's own life. In the preface to Charles Dickens' edition he wrote, "..... like many fond parents. I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child. And his name is David Copperfield" (David Copperfield 21). The notions of biography and fiction are very close to each other, so much so that one could easily state that all fiction is biographical and all biography is fictional. It is not surprising, when writers use their own lives as the subject material for their fiction. They recreate their own predicaments in their characters, weaving together fact and fiction. There are three temporal moments to be considered when looking at the relation between biography and fiction: the time when it happened, the time when it was fictionalised and the time when it was written as an autobiography. The transitional movement from fact to fiction and from personal to universal, when successful, is a subjective emanation to the artistic.

It is apt that there needs to be a reassessment of Indian-English contribution to English literature and Kumar does this admirably through the prism of his own experience. Like Naipaul in *The Enigma of Arrival* Kumar extrapolates this experience. In the preface to his memoir *Bombay-London-New York* Amitava wrote: "This book bears witness to my struggle to become a writer" (5). Today he is a respected literary figure but one gets the sense that the struggle to write, to understand how to write, is an ongoing process for him. The natural and unforced humility of Kumar's personality is reflected in his writings. While reading his work, one gets the unsettling impression that the writer's ego is entirely absent. When asked about his humility in an interview, Amitava Kumar puts, "may have come from my long-time admiration for George Orwell. I was very much influenced by his honesty and contour, and I wanted to be like that." In *Bombay-London-New York* he

speaks of the ways in which the 'soft' emotion of nostalgia is turned into the 'hard' emotion of fundamentalism. Kumar's personal musings cover perhaps a fourth of his book but have an impact far beyond their length. The slender volume of his personal odyssey has enough pathos to overshadow and assimilate his intermittently interesting but mostly descriptive treatise into his own. Upon arriving in America, he gorges on beer and beef, and later reminisces on parallels to the story of another Indian expatriate in London: Mahatma Gandhi. By examining immigrant literature through a highly personalized perspective, Kumar brings immediacy to his account of Indian literature. In *Husband of a Fanatic* he describes his life as an Indian Hindu and his marriage to a Pakistan Muslim at a time when their respective countries were in active warfare. Given the title the book expected to look at Muslim-Hindu relationships at a very personal level but instead it is a long, repetitive ramble through various communal riots on the subcontinent.

Kumar's personal life is scattered like tinsels throughout his book, the snippets from Kumar's past are dazzling. They are so woven into the narrative that the emerging pattern emits a breath of truthfulness and authenticity thereby engulfing it in the air and colours of conviction.

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