PhD Thesis

“Reading biography: The Democratisation of Biography and contested ownership of memories and narrative.”

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Statement of authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed

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Adrian Hale

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In the spirit of collaborative research, I extend my warmest thanks to all persons who have been involved in this study. True to discursive ambiguity I state that you know who you are, and only you know how much you have contributed to the success of this project. Please consider the scholarship of this thesis as a measure of my debt to each of you.
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ABSTRACT

Over recent decades major social changes and rapid technological advances have occurred in the West. These developments have contributed to the rise of a modern publishing phenomenon: mass public participation in the production and consumption of various forms of biography. This has been evidenced in several ways. Firstly, the commercially produced auto/biographical market has grown dramatically in recent years. I suggest that with this growth there has developed an implicit social understanding that a subject, or a subject’s friends, relatives, even enemies, have a right of reply to the printed word. Additionally, greater access to information across media forms has enabled increased public scrutiny and discussion of the formally produced narrative as never before. Likewise, there has been mass growth and diversity in informal productions of life writing, such as: personal and family websites, scrap-booking, journals, diaries, zines, memoirs, blogs, Facebook, MySpace, privately commissioned biographies and family histories/genealogies. The salient feature of such biography is the confidence with which it is produced, and it can be phrased effectually as a statement that “my life is worth telling too”.

The net effect of such a cultural and social movement can be referred to as a democratisation of biography. It represents a significant discursive shift in the formulation and reading of the biographical narrative, which can be rearticulated as a popular questioning of the concept of control over what is a cultural and social participatory artefact. This conceptual awareness or cultural literacy scrutinises and presents an altogether new challenge to the constituent elements of power as exerted over the telling of lives. This power consists of: control specifically over the privileging of certain types of lives; control over the socially determined meaning of lives and their unitary representation; control over the relinquishment of memory; control over the styling or codifying of narrative; and control over the silencing of life narratives excluded from a normative canon of life commemoration.

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1 Krueger (2002); Adam et al (2000); Kateb (1997); Parayil (1999).
2 Jolly (2001); Hamilton (2007); Donaldson et al (1992); Donaldson (2006); Freadman (2003).
4 Doyle (1994); Eisenberg (2008).
5 This is commented on by Hamilton (2007) and Jolly (2001), for instance, but there has not been any empirical study, quantitative or qualitative, into substantiating its reach or extent.
6 My term for the new phenomenon, a definition or identification of which has not yet (to date) appeared in the literature.
7 Pekacz (2004).
8 This is derivative of Barthes and Bakhtin (as quoted in Jaworski & Coupland, 2006:98-108).
11 Friedland (1982).
12 My term also.
Research question

Does the increased and wider social participation in life writing constitute a democratisation of the genre?

Aims of this study

The research question can be expressed as containing the following lines of enquiry:

a. To locate and test claims from the literature that biography has become an immensely popular commercial product in recent decades.
b. To indicate the nature and depth of informal life writing in diverse media, and to compare it with the formal category.
c. To show how the overall increase in the reading and production of life writing across social domains represents a major and unique historical development in which personal expression and social privileging of the unique life are encouraged and allowed greater technological accessibility and exposure than ever before.
d. To discuss the appropriateness of the label ‘the democratisation of biography’, for this phenomenon.
e. To contextualise the current popularity of biography as a unique and particularly modern reaction to ancient and ubiquitous human needs for socialisation through the recording of lives.
f. To show from the literature that biography as a genre has only become a category of academic enquiry in recent decades.
g. To demonstrate from a survey of Australian universities how an uneasy relationship for the generic and theoretical placement of biography in either Literature or History affects its teaching and reading.
h. To assert that biography by definition occupies a stand-alone genre, or to be more precise, consists of a macro-genre into which can be placed a variety of biographical categories.
i. The criteria for generic inclusion or exclusion will be identified, including the implicit pact of trust.
j. To challenge the rigid ideas of social prescriptiveness in genre theory by showing through several textual examples, how biography constitutes a complex genre which eludes any attempts at generic subversion.
k. To demonstrate, using multi-disciplinary frameworks taken from discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and historiography, that biography is actually inclusive of and at the same time resistant to mythologising and ideology, serving a sub-ideological human need that subverts language construction and which owes allegiance to and defines itself as a cultural artefact independently of all other constructions.
l. To investigate the idea that biography has a uniquely individualist Anglosphere tradition, and to suggest reasons for its popularity according to speech and generative/interpretive communities.
m. To demonstrate how the democratisation of biography carries with it the entailment of a consumerist entitlement.
n. To assert through some studies that an informational and cultural literacy exists for the readership of biography, which is far more sophisticated than is understood by the academy.

o. To evidence that as part of this enhanced literacy and social empowerment that the process of writing biography is consultative of relationship and memory, and to assert that this sets up a conflict of ownership; that memory can never be relinquished. And therefore ownership of the biographical narrative remains open ended.

p. To discuss that in the context of a democratisation of biography the author should consider the contributors of data as collaborators in the sifting and writing processes.

q. To redefine collaborative as a conjunct with biography and to suggest a philosophical and methodological shift to further extend the inclusiveness of life writing, without losing its generic integrity.

**Methodology**

This thesis uses a cross-disciplinary framework consisting of methodologies which are historical, literary and linguistic, the latter being especially a blend of discourse analysis and sociolinguistic approaches. This framework was used for 5 principal studies of data collection, with explicit research questions formulated prior to and with generalist conceptual questions responsive to the data collection process itself. These studies are:

1. Ethnographic face to face interviewing of 126 persons for the research of the biography of K G Hale. This occurred singly and in focus groups, with notation simultaneously and directly taken. The questions were prepared and were also responsive to the data itself. The data was analysed for overall trends, content, thematically and qualitatively, using deductive, descriptive and discourse analysis.

2. A commissioned survey by A C Nielsen for sales/trends of commercially published biography/autobiography in Australia for the year 2003, comparing figures from the USA. Follow up questions also added for indicative sales figures for the UK, USA and Australia in 2005, comparing statistical collection in non-English speaking countries. This was compared quantitatively and qualitatively with a larger study prepared by researchers at the University of Newcastle in 2008. Major similarities and differences were analysed.

3. A qualitative/quantitative study of all 39 Australian universities in 2008 using university online resources for trends/incidence of dedicated/stand alone biography subjects offered for study, at all levels. This data was collated by Faculty/Department/School for comparative statistics.

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1 More information and a summary of results for each of these studies are included in the appendices and later chapters.

2 Note: the Appendices offer brief summaries or summative excerpts of these studies, as space does not permit for their full reproduction.

3 K G Hale (1920-1991): political activist, local and state politician, businessman, charity worker, ecclesiastical minister, WW II veteran, family man and my late father.
4. A thematic analysis of 90 commercially published biographies in the English-speaking market using CDA/DA methodology. This included a qualitative analysis of multiple biographies about the same subject/s.

As an interpretive framework this thesis utilizes a blend of approaches which is expected to highlight the narrowness of previous approaches. This offers a greater multidisciplinarity more responsive to the drastically different environment generated by contemporary life writing, which can be found in a diversity of media and functionalities as never before. This will show how the frameworks of current biographical theory are too narrow for the task, perhaps even circular in argument. Without discarding any particular theorist, I expect to demonstrate how a pluralistic theoretical approach is best suited for the inclusive nature of life writing in all its manifestations.
Chapter 1: the current state of life writing and the democratisation of biography.

The Literature (an overview)

1. Biography and life writing as lexical items

The terms biography and life writing are symbols of theoretical discussion and contestation, as are other terms relating to different modes in the production and reading of life representation. This thesis will use the terms biography and life writing interchangeably as semantically and pragmatically equivalent lexemes. Certainly a clear and important distinction exists theoretically between the two major life writing forms: biography and autobiography. There is, however, within that distinction an implicit difference that can be blurred in practice.

At the most basic level of definition biography is characterised as life writing which has a subject other than the author, whereas autobiography is an account given by the author himself or herself. Further, biography is sourced from primary evidence, oral accounts and documentary evidence, and the subject is often dead, while the autobiographer is living, and fundamentally relies on one person’s memory – his or her own. By inference, “the autobiographer typically asks ‘what made me what I now find myself to be?’ The biographer usually asks ‘what was this person’s nature, and wherein lies the abiding importance of this life?’” The expectation is that autobiography will be self-serving, functioning as a means to explain a person’s ideology or actions: “many, not all, autobiographies are vitiated by a wish to seem more stainless than the facts warrant.” We generally expect that biography by comparison will be more independent and analytical. Of course, there is also the chance that a person will render an autobiographical account that is self-flagellating or an expression of atonement, while a biographer may seize the opportunity of registering in print an act of “discipleship (or) hostility.” Or, put another way: “Every great man has his disciples…and it is usually Judas who writes the biography.” We are left with the conclusion that there can sometimes be very little distinction between the two forms, and authorship is not an infallible signal as to content. A biography can be sycophantic, and an autobiography can be self-effacing: “Complete impartiality is an ideal seldom attained.”

1 Taking the linguistic definition of lexeme/lexical item which includes compounds with essential semantic integrity (Crystal, 1995: 118). This is evident in the pre-eminent journal literature also, which invites articles under the general banner of life writing, or more simply, biography (JHU/Project Muse:2008)(Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly: University of Hawaii).


3 Jolly (2001:78).


5 Jolly (2001:78).

6 Ellman (1973:1).

7 Jolly (2001:79).
Nevertheless, when referring to biography or life writing, there is the assumption that if used as a form of generic shorthand, these lexemes will entail and include autobiography and all other, various expressions of the genre: “biography is sometimes merged with autobiography, in that both depict a person’s life”. That is, biography and/or life writing together and separately constitute a hypernym, or superordinate of a semantic field, such that biography represents or includes all forms of life writing. This follows standard authoritative practice contemporarily in the literature such that the terms denote a macro-genre which has media diversity and/or multi-media complexity, and which includes the categories as capitalised in encyclopaedic entries: “Autobiography, Biography, Memoir, Diary, Biopic, blogs” (etc). This is acceptable practice except where a categorical or sub-genre distinction needs to be made for greater specificity. Indeed, the functionality of biography as a term has appeal for its: “openness and inclusiveness across genre (and includes non-) written forms”. Biography is thus more comprehensively defined as:

Our creative and non-fiction output devoted to recording and interpreting real lives…including the entire field of real-life human depiction, in various media…cave painting, oral literature, print, the Internet…a noble field that stretches back to classical times and beyond.

This is a practical usage, even while acknowledging that some dissent exists for the distinction made in specific referentiality to further distinguish between the practice of life writing and the tradition of biography:

‘Life writing’, a variant term that has gained some currency in recent years, is sometimes advanced as a wider concept, though I suspect the reverse may be true: that through its stress on textuality – on the written word – life writing in fact diminishes the richer possibilities of the Greek compound it appears to translate, which more broadly denotes the graphic representation of life, through any existing or potential medium.

Hamilton also asserts that biography has become limited as a term with its literal rendering of “life-writing”, but this is contestable since he also concedes that “biography” has become extraordinarily discrete. In practice, therefore, while biography tends to denote the commercially produced and formally contextualised book, life writing entails the wide variety of biographical...
practices both formal and informal, and the literature uses the terms interchangeably\(^1\).

At any rate, what is significant here is the principle of making such distinctions beyond what looks like a purely lexical exercise. Such distinctions must be reconciled ultimately as a linguistic equation, given that the twin qualifications of arbitrariness and conventionality apply to any discrimination between lexical items\(^2\). Indeed, by way of demonstration, even when synonymically conflating the terms biography, autobiography and life writing as related terms, or hyponyms in a shared semantic field\(^3\), it is evident that conventionality is not easily obtained. The wider social understanding of biography has denotations of “life representation”, but also connotations for “truth and trust”, for instance, which is conventional\(^4\). Conventionally a definition of biography should be a simple task, while in reality it is not, because it is semantically arbitrary: biography means different things to different people. A simple definition of the lexeme biography is certainly an accessible objective, but it is also true that what biography means to different people renders a surprisingly diverse range of responses. This is evidenced in the encyclopaedic collection of detailed and often conflicting entries in Jolly (2001)\(^5\). Likewise, various discussions in the general biographical literature describe the “tendentious” nature of how biography is adopted by the various commentators\(^6\).

Superficially, it might appear disingenuous to state that there is a common acceptance of what is meant by the term biography. That is to say, there is an expectation that a general understanding of the term exists, and this is shown by the fact that, for instance, biographies are grouped together on the basis of genre by librarians, booksellers and media reviewers\(^7\). Larry Finlay, the director of the UK publishing house Transworld, has no doubts over generic integrity:

> If there are serious factual inaccuracies...then how do we know what to believe? You know, if the book is non-fiction, everything within it has to be true, and (you) can't pick and choose which bits are true and which bits are not\(^8\).

Similarly, the international Dewey library system of classification, accords all varieties of life writing only one reference number, under “biography”\(^9\). For lexicographers, the genre is accepted as a non-fictional account of a person’s

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\(^1\) This is both implicit and explicit in Jolly’s summation of all forms of biography which is titled *The Encyclopaedia of Life Writing* (2001). My emphasis added.


\(^5\) The conflicting ideas will be examined in context later.

\(^6\) Donaldson (2006:24-9). This will be taken up at greater length in following chapters.

\(^7\) A C Nielsen (2003).

\(^8\) Wallace (2004).

\(^9\) Dewey Decimal Classification System (2007): 920+ (by author name) although reference books dealing with biography are gathered together under 808.
life, usually located in the wider classification of either literature or history\(^1\). Generally this is the case; however there are significant differences, some of which are made more apparent by looking at lexical shifts over time, because they collectively demonstrate the several socially constructed considerations embedded within these definitions. For instance, the authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary* until comparatively recently, and for many years before that, identified biography as “the history of the lives of individual men, as a branch of literature”\(^2\). By comparison, currently the online edition of the same dictionary offers this definition: “an account of someone’s life written by someone else; [mass noun] writing of such a type as a literary genre”\(^3\).

It is obvious from these references to the *OED* over time that there are two main indicators for an occurrence of lexical shift, which in turn prompts some sociological observations. The first is that biography was once considered the domain—perhaps exclusively—of “men”. Alternatively, it is feasible that the word *men*, as a paradigmatic noun\(^4\) was considered adequate for including whatever contributions women have made or were then making, to the field of biography or to society in general. As well as indicating possible gender bias, this definition suggests that biography has been utilised, or has functioned as an overtly didactic, gender-based ideological tool. This is a view consistent with those as espoused by historical commentators: “History is but the biography of great men (Disraeli)...history is philosophy teaching by examples (Dionysius)\(^5\). Disraeli also remarked that we should “read no history: nothing but biography, for that is life without theory”\(^6\). Of course the precedent was set set by Herodotus when he prefaced his *The Histories* as having the purpose of recording “the great deeds of men...whether Greeks or foreigners”\(^7\).

The more recent replacement of men by the gender-neutral “someone” would indicate that a wider societal acceptance of the value of lives in general has occurred over the past 30 years. This would include the roles of adults and children of both genders. Or, to put it differently, it is recognised now that the expression “lives of individual men” is deficient because it entails that the only persons deemed worthy of having their lives narrated are socially eminent, and/or adult males. By contrast, contemporary biography is perceived as drawing on the lives of a diverse range of persons who are intrinsically interesting for who they are/were, rather than for exclusively what they were/are\(^8\).

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4. *Paradigmatic* is used here in the dual sense pertaining to the semantics branch of linguistics, following Kreidler (2006:41-49). There is also the collective noun, gender neutral *man* which is of ancient etymology and usage, so gender bias is debatable from the lexical point of view (*OED*: cf. *manne/n;guman*).
8. This is supported by the gender-neutral language used in Jolly’s preface (2001:ix-x).
The second indicator is that biography is now understood as a genre of literature, rather than as a form of history expressed as literature. This is a significant shift which reflects a move away from any purely historical connection. The presupposition behind the substitution of the word “history”, by “account”, is that biography is acknowledged as an arbitrary or subjective means of rendering an account of a person’s life. That is, a biography is an account of someone by someone else. This assists the interpretation of a biography as being one of any number of potential versions of a rendered life; that life being as important as anyone else’s; it may even serve the suggestion that the biographer is no more qualified to render that version of a life than anyone else. Whether any of these points is debatable is theoretically, at least, not the main consideration of the lexicographers. The principal aim of the definition is to present the outlook in which biography becomes a negotiated version of events, rather than an empirical standard of history. This seems to be a widely held view, consistent with the new historicist perspective, which also extends the idea of negotiation to the reception of the text by the reader. The literary aspects of biography, as well as the prevailing view of historical texts as relics of an open-ended dialogue, tends to overthrow any idea of biographies as valuable historical documents with predominantly historiographical merit. Instead the genre is seen as essentially a literary production:

Any reading of a literary text is a question of negotiation, a negotiation between text and reader within the context of a history or histories that cannot be closed or finalised.

The centrality of this literary aspect of biography is confirmed by an appeal to a contemporary Australian dictionary. The lexeme biography is given four senses:

1. a written account of a person’s life
2. such writings collectively
3. the study of the lives of individuals
4. the art of writing a biography

These definitions concur with the OED, although the idea of a link to literature is re-badged as “the art of writing”. This idea that biography belongs to literature seems to be a constant amongst contemporary lexicographers. From this brief appeal to lexicography it is evident that social approaches to biography are conditioned normatively, and that lexical shift reflects these imperatives. That is, biography is constructed according to the needs of its users, and it can be suggested that the literature performs the same constructionism in its study of the genre, as will be taken up at a later stage.

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2 Frow (1990:5-7).
5 Chapter 2 expands on this to look at the way biography is typically hosted by English literature departments in universities around Australia and elsewhere.
Even a consideration of etymology seems to reinforce this impression. In comparing the origins of the term biography with the term’s application to such a diverse range of uses, it would seem contradictory, for instance, to include graphic representations, multimedia websites or scrapbooking under the definition of biography, as Hamilton does1. It should also be tautological to see the expression biographical writing and even to have an equivalent lexeme – life writing - but they do coexist. Presumably there is a reason for such a lexical divergence from the term’s comparatively recent invention:

The term ‘biography’ was coined from the Greek roots bios (life) and graphos (writing), and is a term at least 300 years old. ‘Life writing’ is a more recent general term which includes biography2.

Biography pre-exists…Autobiography as a term is relatively recent, being coined by Southey in 18093.

This word and its numerous connexions are recent. No compounds of the group existed in Old Greek: but biographic and writing of lives is quoted from Damascius c500 and biographos ‘writer of lives’ is cited by Du Cange as mediaeval Greek…biography is used by Dryden in 16834.

While there is consensus on the specific lexeme’s coinage and appearance in English5, it can also be shown that precedents existed in ancient languages for the concept itself. The existence of synonymical terms anciently indicates the various uses and expressions of biography:

Biographus, biographia denoting written accounts of a life or lives (was used) in Latin until the Middle Ages…the encomium…the equivalent of obituaries today…was a Greek staple…biography (as a term) narrowed to become the correct dictionary definition for a written record of a particular human life6.

This is significant. If we see that a diversity of biographical forms existed from ancient times, it reinforces the view that biography has a number of functions and applications, as reflected in its lexical shift7. Perhaps this is answerable from the semiotic perspective. If we take the essential description of a biography as a social construct, or social and linguistic transaction, we can see that it has become a blanket term for a range of social interaction which centres on recording a person’s life. This echoes its original “multimedia nature”8. Contextually, while market forces have propelled the form into mainstream book retailing, so that this connection is strongest in the popular

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1 Hamilton (2008:17). This is supported by Jolly (2001).
5 There is debate over the implementation of the form biography which is later than biographist, but most sources agree with the OED. Batchelor (2003) is a dissenter, among others.
definition of what biography is, as reflected in the OED definition, biography also commands attention as an activity that has a long and popular pedigree in human history, descended from and still complemented by oral history.

2. A reassessment of what is constituted by the literature on biography

By extension a lexical reassessment of biographical synonyms-hyponyms also opens up this discussion to what can meaningfully be called the literature on the subject of biography:

We do know that virtually all early societies and civilizations have sought to record themselves through the memorialization of distinct individuals...ancestor worship, bloodlines, and other modes of tribute paid to past members of...have characterized all ancient cultures (from) ancient cave paintings (to) “sophisticated” urban communities today...from biopics to blogs, from memoir to docudrama.

If this is an accepted definition of what is meant by biography, then it can be suggested without fear of oversimplification that the literature on biography should include whatever commentary exists which makes assessments of the depiction of human lives in potentially any medium. This is consistent with the Foucauldian sense of text, so that there is contained meaning which defines biographical commentary as any text which purposefully reflects on the practice of life writing. This would evidence that there pre-exists a presumably continuous and even extensive awareness of and study of biography. This includes whenever persons respond in writing to the depiction of themselves or others. Having said that, however, it is also evident that, overall, the majority of the formally understood literature consists of more recognisably academic critical material. For this reason, it must be accepted that most of the literature is recent, since biography as a field of study has increased exponentially only over the last decade. Using Jolly (2001) as the most comprehensive assemblage of commentary, it is evident that the overwhelming majority of published work on biography is post-1985. The major journals in this field also all date from after 2001.

This is not to say that the field abruptly developed from a minor base, but rather that the recent trend began its upward momentum in the 1980s, at which point the explosive trend was discernible. Prior to this, there were seminal works which treated on biography, but these were encyclopaedic

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1 Murfin, & Ray (2003).
3 Hamilton (2007:1,3).
5 This is my usage.
6 Jolly (2001: i-x, indexes, Contributors/Thematic listings, Further Reading).
7 These are: a/b:Auto/Biography Studies (University of North Carolina, USA); Life Writing (ANU, Australia); Auto/Biography Yearbook (University of Exeter, UK); Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly (University of Hawaii, USA).
8 Wallach (2006:1).
rather than narrowly schismatic for theory\(^1\). Several commentators have remarked on the surge of interest which distinguished the literature in that decade\(^2\) but from a twenty year advantage of hindsight it is very clear that the most dramatic growth, especially in multi-disciplinarity and specialised areas, began in the late 1980s, with pollination from New Historicism and social theory\(^3\).

While acknowledging that the majority of the field is relatively new, there does exist a vibrant tradition for biographical commentary historically, and indeed, there is evidence that some discussion of biography is of great antiquity\(^4\). That is, persons not only were aware of what they were doing as a commemoration of lives, they reflected on it. Herodotus, for instance, was concerned about making his historical portraits of real persons as factual as possible\(^5\). This exposed him to allegations of pro-Persian bias, and his faithful faithful reproduction of the comments of others earned him the title of both the “father of history and the father of lies”, labels applied by near contemporaries and later authors\(^6\). Confucius also argued for a moral responsibility in the historical representation of lives which would be “teaching through exemplary figures”\(^7\). Julius Caesar went to great lengths to illuminate his enemies in a positive light, if only to draw more attention to himself\(^8\). Suetonius, obviously writing in the context of an established, ancient Classical biographical tradition, is careful to demonstrate his methods and sources. As “the biographer of the emperors” he provides “evidence which is abundant and varied”\(^9\). There is also evidence that commemoration of lives was not strictly confined to the trade of the professional, but was rather considered a mark of education and prestige in ancient Greece and Rome\(^10\). Plutarch combined the Greek and Roman biographical traditions into a more recognisable form: “the single most influential window to ancient civilisation (with) his Parallel Lives…the ability to write engagingly about individual lives”\(^11\).

By extension, the act of self-commemoration through the erasure of previous rulers' monuments, as practiced by the elites in ancient Egypt\(^12\), is a token of awareness of the medium’s power and enduring cultural legacy. It could be said, therefore, that there is no biographical text without purpose and self-consciousness, nor is there a biographical text without implicit manipulation of, and reference to genre. It need not be confined to the eulogistic either. In the historical-biographical plays of Shakespeare, the soliloquies of his

\(^{1}\) Examples are: Clifford (1962); Edel (1957)(1987); Friedland (1982); Frye (1957); Kendall (1965); Meyers (1985); Nicholson (1933)(1954); Syme (1974).


\(^{3}\) Jolly (2001); McCooey (1996); Hooton (1990); Donaldson (2006) identify the increasingly cross-disciplinary and specific or tendentious nature of biographical literature.

\(^{4}\) Hamilton (2007:8).

\(^{5}\) Herodotus (1983:3).

\(^{6}\) Herodotus (1983:15-17).

\(^{7}\) Jolly (2001:430).

\(^{8}\) Caesar (1869: Book 1).

\(^{9}\) Syme (1974:1).

\(^{10}\) Stuart (1967:9-10,129).

\(^{11}\) Jolly (2001:718).

protagonists and narrators’ epilogues are intended as windows into the minds of his biographical subjects, but also function as authorial comments on the nature of depiction of lives itself\(^1\). This was as true for his heroes and villains, as it was for the minor characters: personality and reflexivity are very Shakespearean traits\(^2\). The result, with its blending of genre- the historical narrative with the poetics of drama - was: “a new miracle of creative stage drama and language, as well as psychological insight and biographical characterisation, however factually incorrect or mythic”\(^3\).

Even the most encyclopaedic entries under the headings of historical incidences of biography, such as “Victorian pseudobiography”\(^4\) and the 19\(^{th}\) Century advent of national biographical dictionaries\(^5\) should also, and more properly, be seen as simultaneously offering biographical texts and examples of commentary of the practice itself, since they usually reflect on other practices and project a hierarchical view of biographical forms\(^6\). Indeed, the most heavily codified and structured forms of life writing, such as the hagiography, eulogy and panegyric exhibit self awareness- they know themselves, and they self-consciously seek to fulfil their didactic purpose\(^7\).

This thesis will argue that to assert, in the Barthesian manner\(^8\), that forms of biography are merely automated products of social construction, is too simplistic and indeed, perhaps an ideological imposition and construction in itself. Indeed, the nature and extent of reflexive biography would seem to be vastly underestimated if it is confined to modern practice and commentary.

That is why, if we allow the definition of biography as Hamilton suggests\(^9\), and and follow the trail of documentary evidence as suggested above, it is also evident that examples of biographical commentary can be found scattered throughout historical and literary traditions in both Western and non-Western documents. Indeed, any biography-commentary which seeks to meaningfully appraise the depiction of persons in whatever medium it occurs, can be construed as a reflexive discussion of the purposes of biography, not least because it questions, validates or otherwise is deliberately conscious of, the fact that its purpose is specifically representative of a real life. Regardless of whether such traditional, highly stylised forms of biography are regarded as merely serving didactic or other cultural uses\(^10\), these diverse forms of biographical-commentary, by virtue of their very existence, most certainly substantiate the idea of biography being an “ancient and ubiquitous practice”\(^11\). Thus it follows that such biographical-commentary also self-evidences that some critical awareness attends its practice. That is why it

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1 Examples are the Epilogue of King Henry IV (part II); the soliloquy of King Richard II, Caesar’s opening soliloquy (Shakespeare, 1983:442, 384, 756).
6 This is explicitly stated as an aim in Jolly (2001:i-x).
8 Barthes (1994).
9 Hamilton (2007:1,3).
10 The uses of biography will be elaborated on in Chapter 3 under ideology and mythology.
would be a modern, and erroneous interpolation to conclude that reflexive, critical appraisement of biography is a matter of only recent invention. Rather, it constitutes a primal and integral part of the same literature.

3. The significance of redefining the literature and the lexical items of biography and life writing

Put briefly, the significance of such a reassessment is that by highlighting the nature of arbitrary and conventional language choices, the disjunct between popular conceptions of what biography means (this can be referred to as a social literature) and what the academy (or academic literature) promotes as biography is further clarified. Biography is most certainly subject to social constructions which reflect, reinforce and reproduce social norms, as evidenced by the very lexical definitions which have shifted in living memory. If there is evidence of shifting understandings of life writing, there is also evidence that persons producing biography are reflective of their purposes. So while biography is considered to be an “ancient and ubiquitous practice”¹, it has also been subject in its long history to deliberate manipulation for cultural and ideological uses. There is no reason to exempt the academic literature from this type of control of biography for its own purposes, as will be seen.

4. The limits of the literature

Opening up the concept of the social and academic literature in this way might seem to be counterproductive, since at first glance it might appear that little can be added to this exhaustive documentation. By comparison, Jolly restricts the commentary on biography as being categories of “aesthetic, epistemological, ethical and political”² objections to biography. I will look at each of these as issues in turn, but I would also like to suggest a different categorisation. Despite its extensive history, the literature has effectively pursued only two central lines of enquiry. These can be categorised as the historical and the methodological interpretative frameworks.

The historical approach can be characterised, following Donaldson³, as chronicles of biography or even the biography of biography. The purpose of these texts is to chart the development of life writing, and they are summative, in that they are concerned with the cataloguing of the various manifestations of biography anciently through to that found in newer technologies and media. Significantly they focus on life writing for its continuity of, and developments within genre⁴. Sample texts range from the 19th Century collections of national national dictionaries of biography⁵ to the anthologies of published

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⁴ Bolitho (1950); West (1973); Shelston (1977).
⁵ Examples include the UK Who’s Who (published since 1849); the US version (published since 1899); Winchell’s Guide to Reference Books (since 1951); and the UK National Dictionary of Biography (beginning 1885).
biographies\textsuperscript{1} extant today, with some 17\textsuperscript{th} Century precedents\textsuperscript{2}. While there is some history to this type of commentary it is perhaps significant that the most comprehensive text of this category, the \textit{Encyclopaedia of Life Writing}, only appeared in 2001. This would indicate, as Hamilton suggests, that the uptake of biography as an item worthy of academic study, has become integrated and systematic only within the last decade\textsuperscript{3}. It is necessarily a minority of the literature, due to its summative purpose as being primarily a collection of data.

By contrast, the overwhelming bulk of literature on biography is commentary on the biographical method. This is more recognisably understood as a discussion of the biographer’s trade, art or craft\textsuperscript{4}, and it is here that Jolly’s defined “objections” to biography belong. Even biographies themselves perform commentary while fulfilling their narratorial purpose. For example, most if not all published life writing also includes an introduction where the author’s methodology is discussed by way of introduction or within the text itself\textsuperscript{5}. Methodological literature therefore consists of any philosophical and/or practical assessment of the production and uses of biographical documents. Jolly (2001) thus performs a dual role with entries being supplied by commentators who not only summarise instances of life writing but who also discuss the developments and epistemology of biographical practice and theory\textsuperscript{6}. I think it is more accurate however, to see Jolly’s four defined concerns as being, not purely oppositional, but rather points along a continuum of discussion. The general principle underlying the diverse tenets of biographical theory seems to be consistent: they all assert with apparent mutual exclusiveness, views on how best to depict a life. Indeed, returning to the idea of self-consciousness within biographical practice, this view on biography’s purpose and method has a distinct and ancient pedigree: “biographies have been important as genealogical, religious, and didactic forms since the start of recorded literature”\textsuperscript{7}. Overt discussion in the academy dates at least to the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century, with Bayle’s \textit{Dictionary of History and Criticism} (1710), Oldys’ \textit{Biographia Britannica} (1747-60), and of course the reflective work of Samuel Johnson and James Boswell which culminated in the \textit{Life of Samuel Johnson} (1791)\textsuperscript{8}. The method developed established the Boswell-Johnsonian blend of literary-scholarship into a genre of biography as a paradigm which has not been dislodged\textsuperscript{9}.

Nevertheless, beginning with Strachey, who is referred to as the “father of modern biography”\textsuperscript{10}, there have been many attempts to find a better

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{fuller} See Fuller’s \textit{Church History of Britain} (1655) and \textit{The History of the Worthies of England} (1662) as early English language collections of biography.
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framework for the reading and writing of biography. They have not succeeded. Ironically, despite the fact that Strachey himself devoted “five years of research, reflection, drafting and iteration to decide on his overall structure and motifs”1, his “sardonic sniping” alternative method ultimately proved to be a “dead end for biography”2. There is no consensus for any other, single theoretical framework since Johnson-Boswell, which can be considered as replacing this fundamental paradigm3. Following Strachey, there have been, in roughly chronological order, the 20th Century “fascinations” with Marxism, feminism, psychological analysis and semiotic theory, extending to post-structuralism and post-modernism4. All of these theoretical frames have been variously, or sometimes in tandem, used in the literature seemingly in an effort to find an all-encompassing lens with which to reframe and interpret biography. Walter labels these schisms as “tendentious biography”5. Others have observed that, whatever their individual merits, schismatic or tendentious theory tends to be self-serving, positivist, subjective and therefore independently flawed or inadequate approaches if applied exclusively6. There is however, a concession in the literature that each should be represented at least, as being tokenistic of multidisciplinarity, and therefore present in any discussion of biographical theory7. Contextually, even the “anti-biographers (or) biographical dissenters” are viewed as variations on an overarching, or pluralistic and inclusive theme8.

This is at the formal level from these authoritative texts. In reality, it is possible that one theoretical frame might dominate the others. It would also appear that the wider academic literature is riven by a fractious struggle over control of interpretive frames. The significance of this will be taken up in later discussion. As an instance of the gap between the official and the reality, at Hawaii (2008)9 Jolly herself seemed to be quite taken with the latest panacea of Narrative Therapy: claims were made for it as being a systematic approach to “setting up another, alternative narrative…externalising the self”; an approach which also claims to locate a solution for the “historical conflict between oral culture and print media”10. Unfortunately for its biographical exponents, Narrative Therapy’s origins and applications in self-help, social counselling and judicial mediation forums make it already rather dated and methodologically suspect in the same way as other previously fashionable theories such as psychoanalysis11.

1 Hamilton (2008:108).
3 Hamilton (2008:9-10).
7 Batchelor (2003); Jolly (2001).
10 Jolly (2008). Other influential texts in this genre include: Freedman & Combs (1996); Parry (1994); Epston & White (1990); and White (1997).
If the literature is contextualised in this way, recent shifts in theory can be seen as merely points in the continuum of biographical methodological commentary: a practice probably as old as biography itself. Sections of the academy which privilege one frame over all others, can be seen as being stymied and perhaps myopic, but certainly tendentious. A better approach would probably be to reconcile competing readings by looking for underlying commonalities. From the discursive angle this signifies that the literature has privileged form over social function\(^1\) such that meaning and context are secondary\(^2\). A comment at the recent IABA\(^3\) conference noted that a central tenet of inquiry was missing from the literature: “we have not yet begun to look at the readership of biography or multidisciplinarity”\(^4\). There is, for instance, no entry in Jolly (2001) for Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Linguistics or other language related disciplines, although there are connections made to Anthropology and social sciences via the language theory of semiotics\(^5\). Multidisciplinarity, it would appear, remains largely unexplored. That is why the existential why of biography is missing from the literature, especially in the wider context of social meaning. The literature seems to have exhausted the what, and how of biography: the canonical understanding of its history, the means of production, the criticisms of form, and the insular or tendentious interpretations following narrow ideology\(^6\). Hamilton confirms that a discursive discursive gap exists in the literature: “so little has been written about the nature…of biography (especially) the reasons- social, psychological, economic, technological- that biography has reached such (social) prominence”\(^7\).

Partly this is explainable because of the recentness of recognisably academic interest taken in the area:

> Once neglected within the academy and relegated to the dustier recesses of public bookstores, biography has made a notable return over recent years, emerging, somewhat surprisingly, as a new cultural phenomenon, and a new academic adventure\(^8\).

> Biography seemed insufficiently substantial or scientific to merit study or teaching, a fate that became self-perpetuating. Lacking scholars to examine it, and constrained by a focus so narrow...biography’s integral role in the shaping of human identity...went uncharted and largely ignored\(^9\).

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3. The pre-eminent body for international discussion and conferences is the International Auto/biography Association, based at the University of Hawaii. The 6th Biennial Conference of the IABA was held at Honolulu (23\textsuperscript{rd}-26\textsuperscript{th} June 2008).
6. This is the summative content of Donaldson (2006); Donaldson et al (1992) and Adams (2008).
This superficiality in the literature, Hamilton argues, continues¹, and is even more remarkable at a time when biography is widening in both its appeal and in its application as a cultural, participatory artefact in “literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, theology, cultural studies and even biological sciences”². I would suggest therefore, that while the literature is expanding, it is expanding in different directions. The ever-narrowing specificity and investigative topicality of academic writing seems to run counter to the healthy growth and popularity of biography globally. There seems to be, therefore, a movement of pre-analytical fragmentation academically which runs counter to and which is counter-productive for the globalised inclusiveness and diversification of biography as experienced by practitioners, producers and readers.

That is why the sum of the literature can be viewed as having fallen behind developments in the practice and cultural relevance of biography as articulated contemporarily, especially in the light of current discourse analysis theory. The seemingly paradoxical parallelism of the literature is explained by the fact that it appears introspective when it really only generates comprehensive ‘lists’ of biographical examples. It does not however, look beyond the metaphorical ‘wood’ to see the ‘trees’; that is a contextual space framed within a wider human commonality with which to make meaning of this most human of impulses. This is a significant gap which this thesis will address. To achieve this, and despite some qualification, I will argue for a recognition of substantial tenets of such seemingly oppositional theories, not only on the basis of their respective logical merits, but also since biography as a genre is perhaps unique in its ability to reconcile large areas of traditional and more recent critical theory in its generic inclusiveness, reflexivity and flexibility. That is, biography as an actual, constantly developing and growing cultural practice seems oblivious and disconnected to the literature which rages above it, while at the same time responsive to and inclusive of each author and subject. Paradoxically, biography itself as a cultural and social practice responds to each epistemological threat by briefly acknowledging it, often absorbing it, and moving on in a manner reminiscent of ancient Roman pantheism³. In the same way, biography itself personified seems also to be eclectic, but as an entity largely unattached to any particular –ism to which individual practitioners may be devoted: “the various modes of worship...were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful”⁴. This type of polytheism inherent in the practice of biography, if not the tendentious sects of the literature, has been noted:

Compared with the images (of sectarianism) which post-modernism projects, biography is, in spite of its intertextual construction, fundamentally reactionary, conservative, perpetually accommodating

¹ Hamilton (2007:3-5).
⁴ Gibbon (1996:12) in Adler(1996); Volume 37. I think I adopt the attitude of the magistrate.
new models of man, new theories of the inner self, into a personality-oriented mainstream.

This makes, I assert, biography a unique social practice because it actually performs an inclusive reconciliatory role and action both in its production and consumption. This incidentally renders it amenable to analysis through a broad platform of theoretical approaches.

The questions with which this project concerns itself, therefore, can be summarised as an investigation into the challenges presented to the practice and study of biography contemporarily: challenges which have been largely ignored thus far in the literature. It will also be argued that biography, driven by evolutionary social conventionality has become, in its latest incarnation, a truly democratic medium, representative of multiple lives across the spectrum of experience, and it has within it the seeds of a solution to the immediate and future challenges which face it, and which some commentators have seen as a threat. The significance and nature of this democratisation are items which need defining.

The Current State of Biography and its democratization

1. The increased popularity of commercial biography

It is not uncommon to find commentary which declares that biography has enjoyed a phenomenal boom in recent decades. The recognition that such a movement was occurring can be traced back at least to the 1960s. More than four decades ago, one academic remarked on the rising popularity of biography: “Now in England… biographies are innumerable: their production forms one of the country’s most flourishing industries, and they are well liked by readers”\(^3\). Others have remarked that biography is growing year by year, and that it represents a major dynamic in the commercial publishing industry\(^4\).

More recently, as an authoritative statement, it was asserted that:

Biography- that is to say, our creative and non-fictional output devoted to recording and interpreting real lives- has enjoyed an extraordinary renaissance in recent years… it has become the dominant area of non-fiction broadcasting and publishing\(^5\).

An academic at the new centre of biographical research in Australia also noted that:

In a move that’s perhaps indicative of this revival, the British bookseller Waterstones recently placed their biography section at the very front of

\(^1\) Batchelor (2003:63).
\(^2\) Jolly (2001:ix).
\(^3\) Elton (1967:134).
\(^4\) Freadman (2005); Jolly (2001).
\(^5\) Hamilton (2007:1).
their stores, renaming it boldly LIFE. Biography has similarly taken prime position in our nightly television, with programmes such as Dynasties, Australian Story, Talking Heads and Enough Rope. It has bagged the front stalls in our cinemas, where the lives of Casanova and Kinsey, of Truman Capote and Elizabeth I, of Johnny Cash and Alexander the Great are played out on the big screen. In our public libraries, readers huddle over computer terminals, busily researching their family genealogies. The National Library of Australia is now constructing its new co-ordinated online resource for biographical researchers, the People’s Portal, and has recently launched its latest publishing venture, a series of titles devoted to (what else?) Australian Biography.

It is, however, more difficult to substantiate through statistical evidence that such a renaissance actually exists, and it is certain that academic enquiry into statistics is almost non-existent. To be fair, the major reason for such a dearth of research is that statistics have only recently (since 2001) been made available by the publishing industry for the categories of auto/biography. Before that, most statistics for published literature were simply divided into fiction and non-fiction categories, and selectively released. Interestingly, and as an example of the rapid growth in biography sales, it is only in the last eight years that statistics for this category have been considered as categories of substance and were made publicly available by publishers: “Finding pre-2000 (sales) figures may be difficult. Most earlier studies were collated independently and there is no one point-of-contact for these statistics.”

Up to 2001, major publishers kept these figures a closely guarded secret, or released them selectively in trade journals. As an indication of the importance of sales growth in the genre, in the last few years biography and autobiography have been separated into categories independent from adult non-fiction in the United States and Australia. Additionally, technological advances have since occurred making electronic tracking and reporting of sales information easier and more cost-effective. This means that statistics have become more readily available and more accurate since more retailers have been included in the coverage of industry tabulators. Currently accuracy is assessed at over 85% coverage. Consequently, any research being generated now will also be intrinsically delimited by these time constraints, such that it is deductively possible to evidence by the very lack of figures that research into biographical generic popularity is by definition recent.

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1 Donaldson (2006:24) is based at Melbourne but he also has links with ANU, which researches prominently with the Australian National Dictionary of Biography, and La Trobe. La Trobe claimed to be the centre of biographical research in Australia for several years (Freadman:2003). The centre of biography in Australia thus seems to be at ANU, but linked across other institutions.
Nevertheless, the assumption of a biographical boom has been commonplace for several decades. It is not clear therefore, how this assumption arose, or on what basis the conclusion was reached in the first place. It is certainly well-established in the literature. It is a general, perhaps anecdotal truism that needs to be tested empirically, now that the statistical facility exists.

This is not to say that no statistical evidence exists at all, but that it is too sporadic to comprehensively and longitudinally substantiate much of the claims made for it. Nevertheless, one instance of research which does have reliability claims that the biography market is currently an industry within an industry and also, perhaps most significantly, that the returns are enormous. Assessed at a total of $1.36 billion over the period of 2001-2, the retail book trade overall in Australia operates on a healthy net profit margin of 4.1%. In that gross sales figure, biographies account for around AUD$52.398 million, or 5.9% of the total. By contrast, the book publishing industry in the United States of America was calculated at around US$26.874 billion annually for the same period, and of that figure biography accounts for US$765.9 million, or 2.85% of the total. In both Australia and the US the category of biography/autobiography has shown an annual increase of around 30% over two years. This trend was continuing in the year 2002-2003. A follow-up report last year confirmed that these biography categories were maintaining or increasing market share in 2007-8. The market researcher conclusion therefore, is that not only is the category of biography growing, it is growing faster than any other category, and “there is an increase in terms of the share of the total market.”

This preliminary research has been most recently added to by a major study which looked at the US market as reported by Publishers Weekly, and which found similar figures, indicating that biography accounts for around 6% of the total market sales as a median figure over a 96 year period. However, this figure was then assumed to support the authors’ conclusion that the scale of biography has been vastly overstated in the past and that the literature rests on a false assumption of biography’s importance and increasing market share. It is interesting to compare the conflicting conclusions reached when the figures are almost identical.

Both this larger study and the two reports cited previously must be qualified however by some questions over methodology, in particular the collection of data. Upon closer scrutiny of the biographical texts selected by the

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2 This is a suggestion for future research, although I attempt to indicate that some evidence already exists which makes this a reasonable assumption.
3 Australian Bureau of Statistics: publications 1371.0 and 1363.0.
7 AC Nielsen Australia (2003).
researchers in the Newcastle report, as belonging to auto/biography for 2008, it became evident that several high profile books were rejected as not being instances of biography. Yet the same books rejected as being non-biography were being sold by market leader Amazon.com under the category of auto/biography over the same period of data collection\(^1\). It is clear therefore, that the lack of agreement between self-identifying biographical works, as opposed to those chosen as such by the researchers, is of critical importance as an arbitrary interpolation-omission\(^2\).

This arbitrariness was underlined by one item of central importance, which probably indicates more than anything else that research into biographical statistics is at an incipient stage; and this is, that the data collection under the auspices of A C Nielsen-BooksScan in either study clearly failed to generate a research question which comprehensively defined what is meant by either biography or autobiography, or indeed whether the two terms are interchangeable or mutually exclusive\(^3\). These objections indicate that several several flaws were inherent in the data collection methodology. The result is that a nagging suspicion remains that the market for biography is actually much greater than these initial statistics indicate.

For instance, in the Newcastle report, the representativeness and methodology of A C Nielsen’s collation-analytical process can be shown to be probably faulty and certainly overly arbitrary. While touting itself as the “biggest and most comprehensive study of its kind”, it was a very simple process for several academics to find high-profile and commercially successful biographical texts which had been mysteriously omitted\(^4\). Longitudinal\(^5\), comparative, and profitability studies had also been noticeably absent in the study\(^6\). For instance, the question as to why high profile auto/biographies have seen multi-million dollar commissions and advances to

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\(^1\) These texts especially featured Barrack Obama: Amazon.com (2008).

\(^2\) I asked a selection of academics who come from various Australian universities, at the Newcastle conference (July 2008) if they agreed that these texts were auto/biographical. They were familiar with them and all agreed that they were. The exclusion of such texts, therefore, casts serious doubts on the statistical study overall.

\(^3\) For instance, the figures for 2008 did not include significant biographies published of the subject Barrack Obama, a glaring omission which casts serious doubt over the entire data collection process. Other representative years cited in the report omitted other major auto/biographies. A comprehensive, statistically reliable study obviously is yet to be created.

\(^4\) Apart from identifying specific texts known to the academics (in discussions with me at this conference) which did not appear in the lists cited over the past 12 months, I compared the lists with several online retailers in Australia and the USA under the categories of biography-autobiography. Most prominent were the omissions of up to 8 biographies (each), in a US electoral year, of Obama and H. Clinton as listed for sale by Amazon.com. I raised these concerns at the conference and they were dismissed without comment.

\(^5\) Longitudinal study would not just follow best-seller lists annually, but the ‘retail life’ of each book which appears in each list, and would include number and size of print runs, overall sales and relative sales.

\(^6\) All of these studies are easily obtainable from the same data bases that were used to generate the study which Brien & Currie (2008) cited. The problem is knowing how to ask the questions, which, by contrast, the authors of the ABS document obviously did.
the subject/author, if biography is so unimportant to the industry overall, went unanswered¹.

The true social significance of biography can only be reassessed if it is interpreted within a wider set of parameters, including: the specificity of discretionary-leisure² spending on retail books; the non-tangibles of publishing profile, status and media exposure; and the extended life of a text through repeated readings, lending, and reselling. For instance, a closer look at the studies shows quite clearly that no provision is made for the consideration of educational texts, which occupy a segment of around 30% of all book sales³. These should be considered quite separately to discretionary sales, such as novels, self-help, and biography. This would create a more meaningful proportionality for biography, such that they would comprise up to 23% of all discretionary new book sales in Australia⁴. It is evident that there exists an industry awareness of the distinction between a recreational activity and an instructional exercise as viewed by the book-buying public⁵ but there is no such distinction made in the literature as yet. The methodology of these cited studies needs further scrutiny and development⁶.

Another difficult area of readership to quantify is in the category of on-selling and the extended life of a retail book. It is, for example, an integral part of newspaper subscription-coverage calculation to include the notion of a shared readership of each copy⁷. The component of library readership and interpersonal lending demonstrably increases the industry calculation of what constitutes readership for retail books. Additionally, an industry returns policy signifies that once the run of a book has finished, the remainedered copies disappear from official sales figures, although the books are on-sold to discounters⁸. The extent of the print run, excerptisation in other media, and general readership therefore are very likely to be well in excess of official statistics, and probably in ways that elude statistical analysis to any degree of

¹ This question I raised at the Newcastle (2008) conference directly to the A C Nielsen chief executive, citing the commissions paid to Hilary Clinton and Bill Clinton respectively as being significant for profitability: the answer was “I don’t see why that is important”.
² Using the definition applied by economics theory: “The amount of an individual's income that is left for spending, investing or saving after taxes and personal necessities (such as food, shelter, and clothing) have been paid. Discretionary income includes money spent on luxury items, vacations and non-essential goods and services...as distinct from disposable income”:
₃ A C Nielsen (2008); Haughey & Selsky (1990); Greco (2005); Schriffrin (2000).
₄ A C Nielsen (2003). While this is an inductive figure, A C Nielsen’s current data collection does not seem to allow for the precise evidencing of such statistics, since it is reliant upon voluntary industry submissions, currently from 1000 retailers.
₅ Note that ‘Biography’ occupies a separate category to ‘Instructional-educational’ texts in most best-seller lists (A C Nielsen/Bookscan, and The American Publishers Association are major examples). There is obviously an industry understanding that there is a discretionary difference between public buying of biography and ‘educational’ texts: biographies are bought with disposable income.
₆ See for instance the research on educational texts as part of the overall publishing market, and its constituent relationship to discretionary income: Haughey & Selsky (1990); Greco (2005); Schriffrin (2000). The study for biography in this contextualised relationship is essential, but has not yet been done.
₇ This is standard qualitative variable methodology: Malthouse & Calder (2002:248-260).
₈ Australian Publishers Association (2008)
precision. Nevertheless, taking these ideas into consideration, it is plausible that biography as a mainstream social artefact and activity well exceeds the statistical value that has been attached to it in these studies. It is feasible that, taking informal and formal media together, the literature may indeed have been justified in assuming a greater prominence for biography contemporaously than ever before, and that biography in all its forms could very well be an integral personal and social fixture throughout English-speaking communities. Many of these considerations are implicitly taken into account, or are presupposed in the one-off survey by the US Library of Congress, which found that:

In the 1980s biography was the most popular category of non-fiction in the United States, and that it rivalled action/adventure fiction and historical novels. In the past decade more people have read a biography than any other kind of book.\(^1\)

This is a remarkable finding, however isolated. Noting that the survey does not discriminate for ownership-sales but rather the wider concept of readership, it is perhaps indicative of a much greater consumption of biography than even the literature has hinted at. Assuming that a similar situation continues to the present time, therefore, it is likely that the potential readership of biography can be surmised as most certainly being well in excess of the official data provided by the major industry analyst. The conclusion could therefore be that biography dominates the literary landscape across all categories, and perhaps the claims made for it in the literature are indeed not only well-founded, but even significantly underestimated.\(^2\)

While it is true that more specific information is not available, and that studies into the demographics of biography buying are also only in their infancy, a 2002 survey conducted by The Australia Council not only confirmed the industry and literature belief that biography is an important category, but also found that it accounts for the largest category of adult non-fiction book sales. This study further dissected its findings to discover that women aged 35-50 were the most prominent category of buyers: “the $126 million book industry\(^3\) relies on women for the bulk of its sales…they buy more biographies, more general and historical novels, and more romance than men.”\(^4\)

From this instance of research, it can be suggested that certain trends do exist. In the absence of large-scale follow-up studies, however, perhaps we can rely on other features or activities of the industry itself to demonstrate that the trade in biography remains a central, lucrative category for commercial production of biography. Additionally and by way of incidental evidence, it is

\(^1\) Hutch (1997:84).
\(^2\) Indeed, as part of my biographical research (referred to in Chapter 4), one question I asked was if the respondent had ever read a commercially produced biography. The overwhelming majority replied in the affirmative. The implications are obvious.
\(^3\) Note the journalist erred in the figure quoted: as stated in the ABS figure previously, the Australian book retailing industry is worth $1.3 billion, not $126 million, annually. The ABS figure should be considered as accurate.
\(^4\) As reported in The Sydney Morning Herald (1-6-2002; News,p6).
certain that publishers seek media attention from high profile, celebrity biographies in particular to boost sales and profitability and to gain an industry profile and credibility. These high profile promotions can be called prestigious intangibles since they are obviously and overtly linked to profitability, as indicated by investments made as commissions-advances to writers, the advertising campaigns, and book launches-signings. The link therefore, between profitability and industry status is not unfathomable, despite the misgivings of the Newcastle study principals. Taking as a premise that the bidding wars over high profile biographical subjects are part of this level of competition, there is the added certainty that the interest from publishers is presumably a vested concern: logically there is money and prestige in selling biography. They have responded to demand by offering large cash advances to sign up potentially successful writers; by aggressive marketing and launches where the subject attends to sign copies of the book; and by close monitoring of sales and patterns in book buying.

As examples of popularity for individual biographies, the:

“Two most successful biographies in the English language to date are probably Boswell’s Life of Johnson Ltd (1791), which has never been out of print for 200 years and Andrew Morton’s Diana: Her True Story (1992)…which has sold 2.5 million copies worldwide.”

Another of the major commercial successes of 2003, was Hillary Rodham Clinton’s autobiography Living History. It capitalised on her husband’s notoriety and she was reportedly paid US$13 million to write the book. The accompanying book launch was feted by the international press, with excerpts appearing in major English language newspapers around the world. In Australia full-page advertisements in major newspapers accompanied the book’s release, and the excerpts occupied several pages over consecutive days. The release of the book in the United States was described as being comparable to a celebrity appearance, with people camping overnight to secure a signed copy: it then went straight to number one on the best-seller lists in several countries for all categories for five weeks. One editor lamented that after all the excerpts had appeared, there was nothing newsworthy in the book and he doubted that it would sell well. The figures indicated by contrast, that the book sold well as a result of the extracts. Simon and Schuster’s decision to print one million copies of Hillary Clinton’s

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1 Hamilton (2007), Freadman (2003) and Donaldson (2006) comment on these large scale promotions as evidence of biography’s popularity.
2 My term.
3 There is a difference between loss-leaders and intensive title capitalisation. Celebrity biographies are definitely marketed for high returns/maximum profit. Sales and returns are therefore integral to industry profile: Schriffrin (2000).
5 Published by Simon and Schuster, New York.
6 The term ‘write’ is used guardedly, since most celebrity autobiographies are in reality either ghost written or officially collaborative autobiographies: Jolly (2001: Collaborative Autobiography).
7 The Sydney Morning Herald (11-6-2003).
8 USA Today (15-6-2003).
autobiography prior to the release date, was an astute business decision. It was certainly vindicated by the resultant demand: “There were some people who thought [them] mad to print a million copies…that was before Living History went on sale, and sold 200,000 copies -or 20 per cent of its first print run- on the first day. The publisher has printed another 300,000 copies”\(^1\). It was one of the biggest publishing successes of all time\(^2\). The book was number one best-seller over all combined categories, in Australia, the US and the UK over multiple weeks\(^3\). Overall, it easily outsold both her husband’s autobiographies\(^4\), and in 2008 she had a total of eight auto/biographies competing for public attention against each other\(^5\).

High profile biographies in Australia have also attracted major interest\(^6\). One of the best-sellers of all time in Australian publishing was Watson’s unauthorised biography of the ex-Prime Minister, Paul Keating\(^7\), which went to to six print runs, with sales of over 50,000. It stayed on the best-seller list for 15 weeks\(^8\). However Keating was outsold by both Bob Hawke and Mark Latham: “The Hawke Memoirs sold 75,000 copies, the Latham Diaries 55,000\(^9\). Other recent publishing successes include Hazel Hawke, ‘Weary’ Dunlop and a range of other celebrities, many of them sporting identities\(^10\). It must be stated that certain biographical subjects clearly have a greater appeal than others, but cumulatively it is obvious that publishers are highly committed to producing biographies of noted public figures as part of an on-going business strategy. As part of this sales strategy, it is no great leap to arrive at the conclusion that publishers produce biographies because they sell well and because the net return is profitable. One indicator of the interest shown by the public, as well as an evidence of the link between commercial publishing and the interest generated by the media, is that best selling lists of books appear in major newspapers each week. In these lists biographies are prominent in their own right, and, in the category of adult non-fiction, biographies frequently dominate\(^11\). Major publishers and retailers also advertise these lists on their websites, and upcoming launches and promotions are announced through

\^1\ The Sydney Morning Herald (14-7-2003; ‘News’, p20).
\^2\ USA Today (15-6-2003).
\^3\ USA Today (15-6-2003).
\^5\ This performance was in turn exceeded by Obama, who had at one point 12 auto/biographies advertised simultaneously with all featured on the best-seller lists. This later settled down to 8 bestsellers once the campaign was underway: Amazon.com (2008).
\^6\ Best seller lists appear on all the major book retailer websites in Australia, and prominent on all are biographies by special feature and within categories.
\^7\ Recollections of a Bleeding Heart (Knopf/Random House:2002)
\^8\ AC Nielsen statistics as reported in The Sydney Morning Herald (6-7-2002).
\^9\ The Sunday Age (14-9-2008:p7).
\^10\ These will be variously examined at a later stage, with special attention given to the notable failures as well.
\^11\ For instance, The Sydney Morning Herald publishes a weekly best-seller list in four categories. Three recent editions showed biographies dominating the adult non-fiction category (SMH: 6-6-2009;Spectrum, p35; SMH: 13-6-2009;Spectrum,p34; and The Sun Herald, Extra: Books, p12). This is common. Note that there are several lists and categories. While currently Stephenie Meyer dominates overall, this should be seen as a short-lived trend, and biographies are prominent even on the same lists as her books. Interestingly Obama still has one biography in the top 10, on the Independents list, after more than 30 weeks as at 4-7-2009: SMH (4-7-2009:p32).
various media. Such promotions have become a significant feature of the book retailing industry. It would be interesting to research the amount of marketing dollars that are invested in promotions overall, with the proportion specifically applied to Biography publications, but there is resistance to this type of ‘insider information’ being released. While remaining largely a matter of conjecture, therefore, it is still possible to posit that Biography is a predominantly unmapped, but feasibly immense market which dominates commercial publishing. In the context of seeing that certain subjects outsell others, it should also be apparent that the trade in biography displays certifiable characteristics, including buyer profiles by gender, age, status, economic category and even postcode, to name a few. For instance there are perceptions that biographies of tennis players are not very popular:

Bob Sessions from Penguin Australia declined a proposed book on Lleyton Hewitt: “he is in the news at the moment…but what’s going to be in a book for $30?…there is insufficient meat in that book to make it a worthwhile purchase”. Jeff Higgins, national sales manager with Dymocks, confirmed this: "When I was in publishing, we used to consider tennis the kiss of death.”

It is also asserted in the retail book industry that political biographies tend to attract readers from the left side of politics: “Mark Rubbo, co-owner of Readings book stores…said ‘with political stuff, my gut feeling is that the book buyers tend to be on the left side of politics”. There is then, within the publishing and retail industries, an understanding of what customers are buying, which is predictive of demographics. Regardless of whether all the publishers generate and have these statistics, or whether they are industry trade secrets, it is apparent that a vast area of information on the practice of biography remains untapped for academic research.

Indeed, high-profile biographical activity indicates a popular interest which is obviously beyond the ability of statisticians to currently measure, since tabulated sales of biographies are only one indicator of interest. That does not mean they are unquantifiable: but the on-selling and extended readership are difficult to assess. For instance, the number of people reading extracts from, or abridgements of, biographies as published in newspapers or in online media publications, or in reports/documentaries on television, is probably

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2 My repeated phone and email requests for information on commissions, advertising budget and detailed breakdowns were rejected or ignored by many publishers. A researcher at AC Nielsen commented that this type of information was jealously guarded within the publishing trade: AC Nielsen (25-9-2003).

3 This information is collected at time of purchase, particularly by online retailers, but is not released: customer lists are jealously guarded: AC Nielsen (2003).

4 Sunday Age (14-7-2002;p14).

5 Sunday Age (14-7-2002;p13).
immense. It should, however, be considered as being part of, and therefore, additional to, the published sales figures for commercial biographical books.

Additionally, the so-called parallel importation of books through online booksellers, for instance, boosts the official sales volume of retailed books in Australia to well over $100 million per annum, or an additional 10% of overall volume, which adds again to the number of biographical texts consumed domestically. The noted Australian author Richard Flanagan and Dymocks chief executive Don Grover complained bitterly recently about the booming parallel importation of books, as a threat to local publishing, saying in effect that Australians were buying more books overall but that the offshore market, particularly Book Depository (UK) was making inroads into the domestic market. The un-measured categories of online buying presumably also boost the consumption of biography. From these simple considerations, it is evident that the commercial biography has a very healthy retail market and that actual readership is probably much greater than is realised.

2. The other life writing or the rest of the iceberg

A meaningful comparison can be made with the proverbial iceberg, in that formal commercial life writing is the visible, minority recognisable portion of a much larger, difficult to apprehend majority mass of activity. It should be considered that the visible means of production for biography, that is, the formal product as articulated through retail publishing, can be viewed as a social activity representative of a wider discourse. The commercial book is also a privileged form of biography, in that it is received and validated as the officially produced representative of social narrative: it is bought and sold commercially; it is commented on in the media and the academy; and it marginalises all other production of biographical narratives as being amateur, unreliable and suspect for raconteur ability and historiography.

Nevertheless, other expressions of biography can be found in diverse places, including formal and informal products. The formal category includes feature films (or the so-called biopics), documentaries and historical narratives, dedicated cable television channels and a generic assortment of creative non-fiction narratives in publishing and other media. Extending the breadth of

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1 It is obvious that not everyone who reads a newspaper for instance, will also buy and read the published biography. The distinction of casual interest over informed readership, however, is irrelevant to the question of cumulative biographical readership, or total consumption. It certainly requires a statistical methodology which is beyond current research.
2 Grover (2009). It should be noted that these figures are an educated guess, and that online outsourcing of books is ultimately unmeasurable.
4 Online retailers maintain customer profiles as part of their account keeping system: it would be interesting to have access to this type of data!
6 These are assertions which will be substantiated in later chapters.
7 Cable television in Australia, the USA, Canada and the UK features a dedicated Biography channel, as well as a seemingly endless variety of celebrity and historical identity biographical documentaries on the History channel, Lifestyle channels, CI channel (etc): biography.com (2008).
biography in this way may seem to create a substantial and very likely an immeasurable, open-ended list, but it should also be considered at this point that these are all valid systems of narrative, and that there are other arenas for expression of biography beyond the more recognisable, official narratives. Until very recently, the literature ignored these areas as being peripheral to the understanding of the genre\(^1\). The informal areas of biographical production are personal, familial and community-based, but their reach is potentially global. These media include diaries, journals, memoirs, zines, scrap-booking, online personal websites, familial sites, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, family history, genealogy, self-published biography, commissioned biography, (etc).

The potentiality and the preponderance of online sites are significant for the added dimension of a hypothetical readership numbering in the millions. The sheer number of online sites catering for these categories is staggering, and it is constantly growing\(^2\). A conservative estimate would suggest that online sites dealing in, or rather being active in the production of biography, number at least 250 million\(^3\). The number of people actively participating in various life writing media could conceivably number in the billions.

\section*{3. The extensive reading and production of life writing as tied to informational/cultural literacy}

Recently the literature has acknowledged the permeability of ancient media for the biographical impulse\(^4\). It is possible to see in such informal media as graffiti in ancient Rome, the domestic writings of letters and diaries over recent centuries, the oral literature of Australian Aboriginal women’s stories (or “secret women’s business”), and in countless fragmented and personal discursive narratives expressed culturally and in forms which transcend culture, the need to express self and personal experience\(^5\). This is a need, whether as a dimension of wider discourse, cultural belonging or simply a recognisable self-constituted individuality, which has responded to, but which also pre-exists, the relatively recent medium of the commercially published biography\(^6\). Combined with the increased participation in life writing media across forms, there is obviously a latent familiarity with the concept of life recording which seems innately human. That is, there is an informational/cultural literacy\(^7\) specific for life writing which is present across all human cultures and which is developed and adaptive to cultural priorities and available technologies\(^8\).

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The recentness of genre theory overall will be considered in chapter 3, with biography’s location decided upon.
\item Google.com (2008)(2009).
\item Google.com (2009).
\item Hamilton (2008)(2007); Jolly (2001); Donaldson (2006).
\item Hamilton (2008)(2007); Jolly (2001);
\item Hamilton (2008:1-12).
\item Krueger (2002:112-120).
\item Snyder (1998); Thurlow et al (2004). This concept will be developed later, but I am introducing it now to make sense of the ubiquitous nature of life writing.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
That is why it seems logical that this multi-faceted biographical boom has been driven by and is linked to technological and social developments, including consumerism, post-cold war history, social historiography and mass media technology and availability of information1:

I want indeed to suggest that the current revival of interest in biography may be due in part to a growing recognition of the many different ways and many different media in and through which human lives nowadays may be represented and recovered; that the return of biography may have been partly prompted by the rapid technological changes of the past decade, and by the spirit of experimentation which those changes seem in turn to encourage2.

This helps to explain why, for instance, the popularity of family history, genealogy, personal/family websites and scrap-booking, are all activities which capitalise on the marketing of amateur historian-ship. There has been some recognition that amateur does not necessarily equate to poor scholarship: “Many people can write good history who are not academic or professional historians…they should write, even if not for publication, because they best know the significance of the material they have collected”3.

This latent historianship has also been stimulated by the Johnson-Boswell paradigm of scholarship and literary biography, which informs the English language tradition of published life writing4. One legacy, as expressed through the greater accessibility of published popular biographies, at an affordable price and about identifiable heroes such as sportspeople, has seen a wider readership participation occurring5: “biography generates great interest among the general public: works of biography and autobiography sell in vast numbers…by or about leaders…sporting figures…celebrities etc”6.

4. The democratisation of biography and its implications

Democracy as a “system of government where each person shares equally in privileges, rights and responsibilities and participation” is probably an established idea7, but democratisation as a social concept has only recently come into prominence. It has been established, particularly in the context of a post-Cold War environment, as a post-totalitarian transition politically and socially towards a Western political model. The United Nations and other international organisations seek to integrate many nations into a “global village” complete with human rights, entitlements and international obligations.

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5 Freadman (2003).
6 Freadman (2005).
7 OED (2009). I am not going to further define Democracy here, since it is a fact of life for me and my presumed reader, however differently conceptions and experiences may occur locally.
The general principles delineated by an OECD document, for instance, seek to define the concept of democratisation:

Democratisation strives to deal peacefully with conflicting interests in society... There is nothing automatic about democratisation (it) challenges existing power structures... which are linked to formal and actual power structures and relations, as well as the social culture and values in society (it) can only be effective where there is broad-based societal ownership of the process and it is driven by the parties involved\(^1\).

How these generic ideas can be applied to a discussion of biography may not be immediately obvious. Democratisation should be understood as an increase of popular power and control in the medium of biography, such that traditionally non-privileged persons share in the experience of generating biographical narratives, particularly over the telling of their own lives, and the subsequent exposure that is available to these people to disseminate these narratives to a wider audience. As an additional reference to the OECD document, the democratisation of biography also foregrounds the concepts of ownership, power structures and relations, as well as social norms and values, which are all modified by the central idea of shared privilege and responsibility.

As a mechanism of democratisation, the contemporary increased reading and participation in life writing can be seen as productive of a heightened informational/cultural literacy. That is, there exists a social textual sophistication for life writing. Apart from its inclusiveness and representational quality, there is also the link to social empowerment, or “the democratising of knowledge that life writing so charismatically represents”\(^2\). There is access to and sharing of information across social groups on an unprecedented scale. Life writing is emblematic of this notion, but it also represents an arena of control:

Biography addresses and gives voice to many social constituencies including women, indigenous groups, postcolonial societies, and ethnic groups. It gives voice to those who suffer illness, oppression, misfortune, tragedy; but also to those who wish to speak in a spirit of affirmation, inquiry, amazement, even celebration... an increasing number of people are interested in writing family histories or their own autobiographies\(^3\)

There are several features of this increased literacy which I wish to identify. The first is that persons generating biography do so for their own needs: the need to reflect and record and the need to share, or socialise via this information. This creates the paradox of an increasingly personal life writing which has a potential audience of millions, as with Facebook and Twitter. For many if not all of these areas of biography, it is obvious that for every text

\(^{1}\) OECD (20-8-2008).
\(^{2}\) Jolly (2001:ix).
\(^{3}\) Freadman (2005).
there is an author/s and there are presumed readers, even if the presumed reader is the same person as the author. Therefore, the self-publishing of self can be viewed as a private activity, which may or may not be intended for wider dissemination, but which stands alone purposefully as an integrated, autonomous, reflexive activity. If the diary is a type of history, then it is also an instance of “the history of thought”\(^3\). That is not to say that there is not a presumed reader, since the very address “Dear Diary” temporally and spatially displaces the self and constitutes the medium as the presumed reader, or at least implied interlocutor. The implication of a presumed reader does not even need a wider readership, since the private activity by definition anticipates a later reading by self, which is the express purpose of recording thoughts and feelings and experiences in the first place. That is, recording a life experience is singularly for the purpose of being able to return to that experience at a later time and place, metaphorically and literally, albeit transformatively. There is also the concept of implicit future revision, since few diary entries survive a later reading without censorship or rewriting. Nevertheless, it is obvious that a large amount of self-publishing of this nature is intended for a wider audience beyond the self, however that self may be construed or constructed. The very externality and public exposure, at least potentially, of online media sites in particular indicates that people are deliberately seeking a readership beyond themselves. Indeed, it can be suggested that the informal production of, and participation in, biography is potentially the singularly most important and popular participatory social artefact in existence. This is a huge motivating factor, which can be referred to as a fulfilment of the Warhol prediction, where the “average” person seeks their 15 minutes of fame entitlement. However, it is also clear that this approach is totally inadequate for explaining the sheer scale of the participation globally in biography, since only a very small proportion of the total production will probably ever achieve significant public exposure. The potentiality of global exposure therefore produces a paradoxical social artefact: it is produced with the hope, even expectation of being shared, and reaching an audience of thousands, or millions; while at the same time it inhabits an entirely private and personal medium, and possesses the realisation that it may very well go unnoticed.

The second feature is the relationship of informal life writing to the commercial or institutional product. At the level of motivation it parallels the more powerful, commercial and formal biography. The allure or even cult of celebrity, therefore, may provide the inspiration for, the impulse of, and the stylistics

\(\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\) This builds on the theory of presumed or assumed reader implicit in Iser (1978), a foundational item of Discourse Analysis (hereafter DA).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\) Wallach (2006:447).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\) Collingwood (1946:215).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{4}}\) Janson (2002:1).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\) Janson (2002:1-4).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{6}}\) Jolly (2001:Diaries).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{7}}\) Adams (1990:2).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\) Adams (1990:2-11).
\(\text{\textsuperscript{9}}\) A paraphrase of Warhol’s statement in 1968 that “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes.” As quoted in: Kaplan (1992:758).
found in informal biography as an imitative form. If this is true, then to replicate the commercial, privileged form merely reinforces the distance between them. Informal biography would also provide a validation of formal biography and therefore even constitute self-negation, or at least self-effacement. Implicit within the production of an informal form of biography is the knowledge that it does not possess the institutional weight of “The Book”: the commercially and intellectually framed and endorsed official narrative of biography.

However, it is imperative that this parallel division of biography be seen as existing largely for its own sake, and not just existing as a derivative, or pale shadow of the privileged medium. It certainly predates and overshadows the formal text by sheer scale. It is singularly attractive for what it offers the producer and consumer independently of the commercial form of biography: it is local; and it represents, artistically and editorially, freedom and control. Alternatively, and probably more representatively therefore, it is clearly evident that people feel a greater confidence in the appeal of an ordinary life. This can be expressed as an unequivocal statement that ‘My life is worth telling too’. Naturally, the “too” refers to an extant tradition of public biography, a privileged form of biography that elevates certain persons above the mundane to the newsworthy, to the notable, to the laudable and didactic model. It is against this model of biography that the utterance asserts itself. It is also an utterance which presupposes that the control over this type of telling remains firmly with the owner of the narrative being told. It cannot, and perhaps should not, be delegated to another, regardless of how gifted as a raconteur, or otherwise qualified that person is.

The third feature is the way in which informal life writing is unique, such that it occupies a distinct social location. This indicates that individuals are taking advantage of the potentialities of these media to reorder the hierarchy of life writing in general. Potentially virtually anyone can tell the life of virtually anyone else, in a medium which is also often virtual reality. The instant, ephemeral telling of a life most typically associated with online and interactive sites, adds to the perception of faithfulness: it is contemporaneous with the telling; it is unedited and introspective. It is also vulnerable, being publicly exposed to view. Entailed in this proposition is the need for full disclosure as faithfulness to self and the present. The utility of digital media is thus critical to the democratisation of life writing, particularly in its high accessibility and potentially unlimited reach across social groups.

Implicit in this phenomenal success and sustainable parallelism of informal life writing is the fact of social approbation for both the notion of democracy and for life writing as an artefact with social meaning. Indeed, not only is the commercial success of a formal biography conditional on and expressive of,

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1 Foucault (1979:149).
2 This rephrases Freadman’s remark to the same effect (Freadman:2003).
4 This instantaneous feature has been commented on by Jolly (2001); Olney (1980); Lejeune (2000)(2008).
social acceptance, norms, ideology, mores and priorities, the singular feature of biography’s rise contemporarily is the parallelism, in which informal or amateur biography has risen to prominence at the same time as the commercial product. Whatever the true scale of participation in biography may be, it is certain that it represents a major social participatory artefact and activity, consistent with social values relating to democracy as a concept.

This is the fourth feature: the competition or threat to the formal product implicit in the rise of informal life writing. The democratisation of biography should therefore be seen as a power shift which has, and is occurring, on an historically unprecedented scale for the practice and reading of biography. This mass participation in, control over, consumption of, and production of biography as articulated through such a diversity and scale of media in biography, is an area of a person’s life over which contemporarily people can exert ultimate control as never before. Perhaps it is a resumption or re-appropriation of control which compensates for a perceived or actual loss of control in other areas of their lives. The ideas that any life is worth recording, and that control over the telling of a life belongs as much to the subject as anyone else, constitute a threat to the academic or professional biographer. Perhaps most telling is the academy’s low valuation of the wider expression of life writing through the literature’s inattention to it. It might even be an anti-democratising matter of generic definition and practice, such that the literature retains an efficient monopolisation of knowledge unrelated to developments in the external environment. So informal life writing might actually function as a subversion of the formal variety.

Further evidence will be presented to indicate an increased individual readiness across social domains to question the privileged production and authorial voice of the privileged forms of biography. This democratisation presents a conflict between the established, formal biography and the readership of this biography. The concept of democratisation, therefore, as applied to biography is that it requires and generates a mediation between conflicting interests. In this case, biography consists of two forms distinguished by a power differential: one privileged and the other hidden. It is in the disparity of power and the convergence of readership that the tension has arisen. The need for a redress or correction in power, therefore, is due to a shift in power which has already occurred.

Looking at the issue causatively, it is evident that the contestation has actually arisen through the growth in popular control and participation in the parallel systems of biography. Ironically, the issue is that the very success of the traditionally privileged, standardised form of biography has led to its subversion, through an increase in consumerism, imitation and through fragmentation into alternative media which echo models but which also generate novelty. Formal biography has been a privileged forum of life writing in the past, but it is increasingly under siege from two fronts: commercial success and imitation. Biography can be seen as a victim of its very success. That is, the industry now, more than ever, relies on the book-buying public.

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1 Freadman (2003).
interest in the category of biography. With each high profile biography representing a major financial and reputational investment, biography as a genre has become a major entity worth hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars annually for the publishing industry worldwide. The stakes for success or failure are proportionately greater than they have ever been. Publishers are careful to respond to market demand for choice of subject, biographer, marketing—even in the graphic design of the book cover. Editors will obtain legal advice on libel liability and historical facts will be checked prior to publication; and the media will readily provide dissenting reviews, quoting from dissenting associates of the biographical subject wherever possible. Usually this type of scrutiny is couched in terms of open debate and for right of reply. It could be argued, therefore, that the consumer implicitly steers the industry to a degree never before seen: the industry needs consumers more than consumers need books. There is also the implicit sophistication in such a saturation of the market: the more biography is sold and read, the more conversant with the genre readers become. It is logical therefore that the readership of commercial biography has become more sophisticated, more discriminating, and more representative of cultural literacy and intertextuality. It is likely that the consumers of biography decode each text relative to every text they have read and ingested, and are conversant with lives to a degree unfathomed even in the academy.

Building on the premise of what constitutes a readership of biography, with its powerful blend of democratising influences, it can be further suggested that biography is a generative mechanism as well as a catalyst of social change. Perhaps it even constitutes a social revolution, since it subverts the authorial voice as never before, and presents a validation of the everyman/person as autonomous and viable author. The implications for the consideration of this form of human expression are enormous: as a vehicle for resistance, personal expression and identity, cultural belonging and interpersonal communication, biography has always been potentially, but now actually is, a major centre of human interaction. Further evidence will be presented in support of this assertion that the literature has by default rejected the significance of the readership of biography.
CHAPTER 2  Biography and Genre: Creative Licence, Fraud, Libel, and Generic Manipulation.

Introduction

This chapter will explore Hamilton’s proposal that biography exists as an integral, distinct but extremely diverse and multi-media category of human activity1, comparing it with the academy view which positions biography as a sub-genre partly within historical, but predominantly located in literary traditions2. Interestingly, both positions make appeal to the phenomenon of genre to support their conclusions and categorisation; but they occupy positions of interpretation which are ultimately binary. The program at the University of Hawaii is closest to Hamilton’s position, but this viewpoint can be described as the minority position in the academy. The academy in general has selected literary biography as a focus for study, prioritising memoirs and creative writing over other life writing. For Hamilton the ultimate generic determinant is factuality or generic conformity, while the balance of the academy privileges generic creative subversion3.

In order to substantiate the generic differences as outlined briefly here, I will investigate the uptake of biography across all Australian universities, comparing them with some leading UK and USA universities for generic filtering of life writing. I will then investigate the ways in which genre is understood by the academy, indicating that this is significant for the ways in which biography is studied and taught at the tertiary level. The merits of genre theory will be assessed for ways of reading as well as ways of producing biography, with the academic understanding compared to the popular ways of reading life writing by genre.

Further I will show that what Hamilton points towards but does not actually state, is that a hierarchy of reading can be identified in which genre theory4 assists an understanding of why biography not only conforms to rules or social expectations, but also how biography manages to establish these norms in the first place. By way of evidence I will demonstrate how the majority of readers of biography continue to determine the generic limits and content of biography. This will involve looking at several high profile historical and contemporary commercial biographies which were spectacular successes or failures: such that their success or otherwise can be explained by their level of generic conformity. It will be shown that this analysis evidences popular resistance to radical generic neglect or subversion. Fraud and libel, as extreme instances of life writing confrontation, can be re-characterised as being instances of where deliberate generic manipulation also runs foul of

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2 Batchelor (2003); Edel (1963)(1984) are good examples, while Jolly (2001) documents the variety of opinions and concurs with this majority view of literary biography being the standard form.
legal restrictions on creative licence. By their very existence, these concepts evidence conventionally endorsed authority for these legal restrictions over representation of a life.

This chapter will also distinguish between the possibilities afforded by generic limits for subjectivity within biography and the perceptions of accountability for the biographer. It will be asserted that there is a popularly and critically defined limit for the creative element within biography such that texts which exceed this generic tolerance occupy a realm at the periphery of life writing proper, which further supports Hamilton’s views. It will then be suggested that the discrepancies between popular and academic acceptances of generic conformity indicate that perhaps the popular understanding is more sophisticated than it is given credit for. It will be asserted that this sophistication consists of an understanding of the possibility for creativity and non-fiction within life writing as well as tolerance for some degree of fictionalising within any biographical narrative, but that this admittance of fiction has strict, measurable finiteness. I will then, using elements of discourse theory, question how much this generic understanding is explainable purely as a social construct informed by the practice and experience of biography, given that the practice and reading of biography respond to a wider social, even fundamental human need for communicative trust and social validation.

**Biography as neither history nor literature**

It should be noted at this point that a generic problem has always plagued any discussion of biography in the academic literature. Until very recently commentators even refused to acknowledge the utility of biography as a functional item of either history or literature, let alone an autonomous field of enquiry. For instance, biography was treated as: “A kind of stepchild of history and literature, with neither of those disciplines granting it full recognition”\(^1\). Or it was “a peculiar genre, which purports to be both literature and history but is not entirely one or the other”\(^2\). Or, even more to the point:

> Biography is essentially, and by its very origins, disreputable…it has always had the doubtful status of a maverick or mongrel art…fiction married fact, without benefit of clergy…the result was a brilliant, bastard form, which has been causing trouble ever since\(^3\).

The academy has a history of ignoring or “attacking” life writing since at least the 18\(^{th}\) Century\(^4\). Nevertheless, overall, prior to 1990 commentary was sporadic, and the literature usually dealt with the history of biography rather than developments in the genre\(^5\). Perhaps this is due to the peripheral status

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\(^1\) Olney (1988:xiii).
\(^3\) Batchelor (2003:15).
\(^4\) Batchelor (2003:15).
\(^5\) As discussed in Chapter 1.
of biography, traditionally occupying a zone at the junction of literature and history, having elements of both disciplines but scorned by purists of both. Some historians have assumed that biography is a literary form exclusively: “Even in learned libraries, biography is apt to be regarded as a branch of literature or literary criticism, rather than as history...biography is for gentlemen; history is for scholars”\(^1\). Another criticism was that: “Biography, even at its best is a poor way of writing history...the self-respecting historian should have nothing to do with it”\(^2\). Even today, this seems to be a resilient attitude, despite the acceptance of some life writing as primary sources\(^3\). Biographies proper are regarded as suspect sources; historians still frequently denying “such texts the status of reliable sources (even while) accepting diaries as eminently respectable sources”\(^4\).

Similarly, literary commentators have also traditionally rejected ownership of life writing: “we are, I suspect, still embarrassed by a form which is ‘non-literary’...we are suspicious of the form and the content itself”\(^5\). There is the consciousness that biography has been historically an ‘official’ form of retelling the past and is therefore linked to the blatant efforts of elites to commemorate themselves: “the origins of biography are to be found in the early accounts of monarchs and heroes”\(^6\). Or, it is an historical impulse “having its origin in the desire to commemorate the deeds of the great, one of our earliest forms of literature”\(^7\) and therefore a flawed form of literature where where form is subservient to function. It might even be possible to trace the mistrust of history as it relates to biography, to the “pioneer” of history, Herodotus, who introduced his “specialised meaning of history as (being) so that the great deeds of men may not be forgotten”\(^8\).

**Biography read partly as history, mostly literature, but not itself**

Despite this traditional impasse, the literary suspicion of content and style has apparently given way to an acceptance of life writing as a field of academic enquiry, such that it “has steadily gained acceptance as a mode worthy of critical study”\(^9\). The claim that universities have now embraced biography is well-established\(^10\). However, this claim needs some qualification, since Hamilton counter-claims that it is not a wholesale, but rather a selective, even tentative adoption of biography as a field of study by isolated academics in only some universities\(^11\). Indeed he has asserted that it is a belated uptake which has also resulted in a sporadic engagement at the departmental level:

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\(^1\) West (1973:5).
\(^2\) Hancock (1976:54).
\(^3\) Jolly (2001:431-432).
\(^4\) Popkin (2008).
\(^5\) Shelston (1977:2-3).
\(^7\) Yelland, Jones & Easton (1983:20).
\(^8\) Herodotus (1983:7).
\(^9\) McCooey (1996:1).
\(^11\) Hamilton (2007:4, 308-312, notes). He documents some of these claims in his notes by referring specifically to programs at comparable universities in the US, the UK and Australia.
“the subject of biography has no major department devoted to its study at any single university in the world save in Hawaii”¹ There is the presupposition and lingering idea that, if it has only recently been adopted by universities as a subject, overall biography must have been previously deemed as “unworthy” of tertiary study, or it was simply too difficult or elusive as an item of literature or historical/cultural artefact². It has been “regarded as at best a humble adjunct and at worst an intrusive enemy”³. One academic commented that biography was not included in the canon of literary works because of any “oversight”, but rather simply because the:

English Literature courses are already overloaded…until the 1980s, English departments in most Australian universities tended to discourage postgraduate students from producing biographical theses, preferring ‘critical’ textual studies according to prevailing genre- or text-focused theoretical approaches⁴.

Assuming that biography has now become an accepted, although minor part of the academy⁵, it is instructive to examine in which particular faculty or department biography is actually adopted, when it is taken up at all. The claim that life writing has been taken up inconsistently by tertiary studies, and not in any holistic fashion, needs to be tested. This is a testable claim and it refers to a stable, representative environment which can be researched. Overall, in an online survey of all 39 Australian universities⁶, it was found that biography is not offered as a subject in the majority of these institutions at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. Where it is offered, it is located predominantly as a category of Literature and/or Creative Writing. There is some crossover from Communication and Journalism, and a minority of subjects are placed in History.

Indeed, the following was noted: between end-2007 and mid-2008, out of 39 Australian universities, the majority (21)⁷ did not offer any specific subjects/units in life writing. Of the minority (18) which did, life writing subjects were offered in: English/Creative Writing/Literature (11); Communication/Journalism/CNF (4); and History (3). This supports Hamilton’s assertion, with the following caveats: La Trobe and Edith Cowan offer subjects across English, History and Creative Writing (but base the discipline in English); ANU bases its Research Centre in History (publisher of the Australian Dictionary of Biography), but has links across institutions now

¹ Hamilton (2007:4). Hamilton qualifies this with an acknowledgment of the growth in life writing studies, but with the possible exception of ANU (which has further developed its cross-institutional research arm after Hamilton wrote in 2007), it must be accepted that his assertion is mostly accurate.
² Wallach (2006:1).
⁴ de Groen (2003).
⁶ Appendix B.
⁷ The ratio is close, and may very well be closing, so it can be rephrased as saying that slightly less than half of all universities in Australia currently offer life writing subjects.
which makes it more cross-disciplinary\(^1\); and a comparison with a search undertaken 18 months previously found that the number of subjects being offered has grown overall since then, across universities in Australia\(^2\). Of course it was also noted that some subjects were offered as electives and were available across courses, but the staff teaching these subjects were most typically located in English/Creative Writing/Literature. Internationally, a further comparison was made with leading universities in the UK and the USA\(^3\), and similar results were found. As Hamilton asserted, only the University of Hawaii has what can be described as a stand alone research centre in biography, offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees which specialise in life writing\(^4\).

Following Hamilton\(^5\), this survey therefore evidences that in the majority of universities across Australia, life writing is not taught at all, at the unit, course, or subject level. It also predicts that similar results will be found in the USA and the UK. Where it is taught in Australian universities, it is typically subordinate to Literature and Creative Writing programs and is offered as a core unit or elective within those programs. With the extension of Journalism and Communication programs, this indicates that Hamilton was also accurate about biography being comprehensively treated by the academy as an area of creativity and personal expression with various social or sociological distinctions and interpretive frames being imposed, in links to Communication courses\(^6\). In further searches this pattern was replicated when looking at various universities represented by presenters at the IABA conference in Hawaii (2008). The overwhelming majority (82\%) of active participants (174) were representing exclusively English literature departments/faculties or departments with stated direct links to English\(^7\). Therefore, it suggests that the way life writing is taught at universities around the world will follow this pattern: that biography is a medium of literature best understood by the lens of contemporary literary theory. The historian Popkin comments that the uptake of biography by literature and its neglect by history is significant:

> The so-called linguistic turn in contemporary thought (is lamentable) history can and should contest the literary theorists' bid to annex

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\(^1\) Donaldson (2006:23-29). To my mind this qualifies ANU’s program as comparable to that of Hawaii, being cross-disciplinary. No other university researched here, however, has any comparable, highly developed program, which endorses Hamilton’s assertion overall as being accurate to date.

\(^2\) This is a net gain overall, as some universities have developed courses during this time, while others have dropped courses, and some are only offered in alternate semesters as core units or electives. It is demonstrably a fluid environment, which may also indicate the early stages or experimental nature of offering life writing in some institutions.

\(^3\) Leading in this case meant universities which produce or co-edit a biographical journal, and include: University of Sussex, Cambridge University and Oxford University in the UK and New York University and the University of Hawaii in the USA.

\(^4\) The Center for Biographical Research (at) the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

\(^5\) Hamilton (2008:8-9).


\(^7\) Appendix B; and Hawaii (2008). This includes the participants who identified as literary translators, or who identified as linguists (6 in total) attending the conference which was entitled Life Writing & Translations. The distinction between literary translation and translation proper will be discussed in chapter 4.
(biography) to the realm of fiction...because history and (biography) are so closely related.

The generic significance of reading biography as literature

The importance of these frames will be taken up at length in succeeding chapters, but one example of an interpretive frame which needs consideration here is the simplest classification of biography by genre. One method of distinguishing types of biography, is by the degree of factuality. At one end of the spectrum lies “scholarly” or “chronicle” biography, characterised by the author being largely absent, and the text being predominantly “an extensive collection of facts”\(^2\). At the other end of the spectrum lies “narrative”, “literary” or even “fictional” biography, where the author intrudes into the chronicle and presents a narrative that progressively ignores factuality. There is more allowance for artistic licence in “literary” biography, because the reader implicitly understands that, usually, the author is not pretending to be producing strict historiography\(^3\). This distinction separates life writing’s traditional tendentious forms into two categories, where documentation and narrative are essential discriminators\(^4\).

It is interesting to see the value system attached connotatively to the labels of literary and scholarly biography. Literary biography is prioritised across tertiary courses\(^5\). It is described as a non-fiction genre where the subjectivity of the author is valued, and includes discretional creativity in narrative and reconstructed conversations and events\(^6\). It is also considered to be reflective and theoretically observant, acknowledging the “fictionalising tendency of life writing” while forming an accessible “bridge between the academy and the common reader”\(^7\). This is indicated for instance in the prestigious ANU Australian Dictionary of Biography which discusses and presents entries as “literary biography”\(^8\), despite the ostensible location of biography at ANU in history. Indeed, there is an inherent contradiction in Donaldson’s assertion that historian-ship dominates the production of this type of biography:

> The most serious academic investment in Australia in recent years must surely be the Australian Dictionary of Biography project...run through a national committee...editorially managed largely by historians, not by post-modernist scholars\(^9\).

Apart from the binarity of setting up a mutual exclusivity between post-modernist scholars and historians, which is highly reductionist and gratuitous, the disjunct lies between the production of biographical entries using an historical method, which method remains unspecified, and the framing and

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\(^1\) As quoted in Jolly (2001:432).
\(^3\) Hutch (1997:69-70).
\(^4\) Pekacz (2004:8-12).
\(^5\) Appendix B.
\(^7\) Batchelor (2003:1-2).
\(^8\) ANU (2008).
teaching of biography as literature, which is clearly specified and thus transparently subservient to a political agenda. A critical reader would interpret such opacity in method to mean that any production and reading of literary biography must serve a ‘de-fictionalising’ function, but this runs counter to standard Marwickian historical methodology which seeks to expose and undermine overt political agendas. There is a tension therefore at the interpretive and methodological levels. Similarly, the University of Michigan offers an online *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, while Oxford University produces both the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (UK) and the *American National Biography Dictionary* with their “literary biography entries”.

Scholarly biography, on the other hand, is devalued at the tertiary level. It is a genre of life writing where:

It was believed that the goal of biography was the reconstruction of the subject’s life, and that primary evidence organized in a chronological order was the means of arriving at this end. Second, a scholarly biography was expected to be “scientific” and to engage only in “verifiable” questions, such as those pertaining to the chronology of the composer’s life and works. Further, the subjectivity of the biographer could and should be eliminated. Further still, biography was viewed as an accumulation of primary sources, rather than as a conceptual, interpretative work.

It is presumed that scholarly, “pure or scientific” biography tends to be positivist and archaic as well as “ultimately unsustainable under the weight of ever increasing documentation”. As merely a collection of documents without narrative, scholarly biography fails the conventional academic criteria of biography.

Meanwhile, literary biography operates under the auspices of literary theory, and, overall literary theory is valued more highly wherever life writing is taught. The significance of this type of categorisation is that a range of theoretical stances opens up when biography is taught predominantly as literature rather than historiography. Literary biography thus begins from and incorporates historical theory but is most commonly theorised as creative literature, with variegated stances ranging from strict methodology recognising tenets of historical rules of evidence in the more traditional sense through to the “more fashionable post-modernist and relativist stances”, where concepts of fictionalising and mediation dominate:

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4 Pekacz (2004:10).
5 Pekacz (2004:10-12).
7 Pekacz (2004:12).
The working theories include (that) biography is a traditional, rather old-fashioned form (but is also) an art, in a large sense invention (but is also) as accurate as the biographer’s art will allow (but is also) reliant on documentary evidence (but is also reliant upon) intuitive recreation…the tale is more important than the life.

This theorisation, constituting the literature on biography, naturally accompanies and contextualises the teaching of biography at universities. It will be asserted that more radical theorising of biography also occurs within the context of Creative Non-Fiction, which typically prioritises memoirs and other “more creative” categories over other forms of biography. A good distinction is made by Gore Vidal: “(biography) is the attempt to recreate the facts of a life; a memoir is (merely) an impression of a life.” It certainly seems valid then, at this point, to accept Hamilton’s assertion that biography is not taught independently of literary and social theories which he claims are not only completely unrelated to the practice of biography but which are utterly detrimental to any real understanding of its social meaning. It seems reasonable enough to suggest, as he does, that life writing should be understood as a unique human practice, and should have independence theoretically from other fields, while still retaining the benefits of multidisciplinarity. While this lack of complete independence as a course concentration is explainable by the recentness of its uptake as a field of enquiry, it is logical that it would also predict the generic and ideological norms by which life writing is taught and produced. It also suggests that its placement within existing discursive frameworks means that life writing is not studied independently of a subordinated context, but rather that it is schismatic and tendentious, and that it will exhibit resistance to cross-pollination beyond social theory. That is, if biography is studied using the lens of literary theory it is reduced to an item of literature. If it is studied as an item of literature, it is associated predominantly with social construction. Both views, I shall demonstrate, are inadequate and reductionist.

**Genre**

1. The conventional-utilitarian view

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2 More evidence for this conclusion will be provided later. For instance, the privileging of certain texts as representative of an understanding of biography signifies the presence of theoretical positions. In this survey university prescribed reading always includes Strachey and Woolf, but rarely Boswell.
3 Newcastle, Bond and UWS are typical of this prioritisation and this concept will be examined later in this chapter.
8 Donaldson (2006:23-5). This discussion of selective and ideological usage will be resumed in chapter 3.
9 This was my experience at Hawaii (2008) when I used DA to analyse biographical practice, to find that it was a unique and little understood approach.
Having presented and substantiated the claim that biography is indeed located predominantly in English literature departments at the tertiary level, it is necessary to further examine the implications of reading and teaching biography as a literary genre, rather than as a wider social practice. To achieve this, genre itself needs to be interrogated as a social construction, both arbitrary and conventional, to see how biography becomes highly codified and defined, subordinate to literature. At the heart of literary theory’s reading of biography is the re-theorisation of genre, and it is here that the divergence between readings of biography is most transparent.

Genre is described as a useful system for classifying literature on the basis of textual differences in content, function and form. The word itself is traceable to an ancient Greek lexeme meaning ‘type’ or ‘kind’, although in the sense in which it first appeared in English, used to describe broad classes of music, art and literature, it was a direct 19th Century borrowing from French. The etymology is significant since it indicates a fairly recent take-up of a loan word, for which there was contemporarily an inadequate referential component in English. Indeed, it was a linguistic recognition of rapid cultural developments in varieties of literature which had outstripped the language’s ability to describe them. Lexically, it is most commonly understood in literature as denoting “an identifiable category of [literary] composition”. Or, more specifically:

[Genre is] A term used to describe types or categorizations of literature: tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric, pastoral, novel, short story, biography, essay, and so forth.

At the most elementary level, literary genres are distinguished from each other on the basis of shared characteristics of the texts within each genre. In current usage, it is also possible to find the most elementary distinction for literary genre as being between texts that are fiction or not: “the most important genre distinction is... between fictional and non-fictional”. Similarly, genre is thought of as texts linked and defined by “family resemblances, a set of similarities some (but by no means all) of which are shared by those works classified together”. Ostensibly therefore, texts sharing a generic classification will have more characteristics in common with each other than they have with any other texts. Further:

2 Many theorists erroneously limit the etymology to French via Latin as a 19th century borrowing, but the Latin genus is a borrowing from the Greek genos. This simplification appears in Butler (1985:734), for instance. Indeed, the lexical potential of the original Greek genos has resurfaced in English sporadically over the past eight centuries in various words and from diverse extra-linguistic sources. Examples include: general, genus, generic, gender, gene (Oxford English Dictionary:2009).
9 This is a functional definition which will be qualified further. For instance, texts that are similar in content and other superficial characteristics may be radically different: a (fictional)
Conventional definitions of genres tend to be based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content (such as themes or settings) and/or form (including structure and style) which are shared by the texts which are regarded as belonging to them.

It can be seen then, that functionally and stylistically a genre operates to define classes of literary texts; by which classification the genre also stipulates the author’s intentions and anticipates the reader’s expectations. Implicit within this type of inclusiveness of course, is also the expectation that all other texts can be defined as not belonging to that specific genre. Indeed, so important is the understanding generated by generic description that it has been suggested authors and readers could not negotiate texts without it:

Defining genres may be problematic, but even if theorists were to abandon the concept, in everyday life people would continue to categorize texts.

This is an illustration of the centrality of the concept of conventionality to express the binding nature of what is an agreed-upon, but ultimately arbitrary classification. To demonstrate the nature of such codification at its most elementary, a teaching resource sample offers the following simplified explanation of genre, in referring to biography:

Genre: Biography. Definition: The true story of a notable person’s life written by another person. Common Characteristics: 1. Describes the person’s surroundings. 2. Shows how the person affects other people. 3. Provides examples that demonstrate the person’s behavior. 4. Supplies details that illustrate the person’s individuality. 5. Implies or notes how the writer feels about the person.

This demonstrates how the idea of an agreed generic label essentially presupposes a code by which texts can be written and read. The generic description offers not only a definition of any given text belonging to that genre; it also offers ideas on the purposes of writing within this code. Similar ‘guides’ can be found at all levels of educational texts. For instance in NSW secondary schools, there is a course offered within English Stages through the Board of Studies which details the generic distinctions between Fiction and non-Fiction. Students are required to not only understand the broad generic categorizations but also to analyse the stylistic differences and subjectivities present in the author’s (composer’s) text. The course materials for a novel may be written in the style of an (non-fictional) autobiography, for instance: Hunter (1996:9).

1 Chandler (1997).
2 Chandler (1997).
3 Elementary/primary education resource from Heart of Dakota Publishing (Homeschooling USA)(nd).
4 Teaching of genre is a fundamental aspect of primary education in Australian curricula, for instance: Callaghan (1991). This teaching of genre would also extend to the guides offered to tertiary students for citation of references and for prescribed texts, which define hierarchically the suitability of academic reading/genres.
include guidelines such as requiring students in Year 7 to identify and analyse two texts which are biographical for: “The use of variations within conventions of particular genres, including...how these variations address the composer’s purpose”\(^1\). Similar formatting is found in the curricula of other Australian State Education Boards from K-12\(^2\). Such a narrow, prescriptive code also suggests a static purpose and limited variety of potential texts. Teaching genre in this way would also presumably tend to fix expectations, reading and production of texts within genres: “teaching genre may also take the form of instruction in the practice of genre, especially in writing programs in secondary and tertiary education”\(^3\).

Theoretically at least, this is logical, and historically it is demonstrably applicable to practice: generic classification for literary types, as with most artistic forms, has been fairly static throughout history, at least until relatively recently\(^4\). This is true particularly in the Western context, principally because recent innovations compare starkly with the traditional derivation and usage of genre which endured almost intact from ancient Greek forms until the Renaissance\(^5\). Overall then, genre has been lineal rather than dynamic, and prescriptive as much as proscriptive. Without detailing the genealogy of genre itself\(^6\), it is summarily possible to see that:

According to the traditional view...genres were seen to be (a) primarily literary, (b) entirely defined by textual regularities in form and content, (c) fixed and immutable, and (d) classifiable into neat and mutually exclusive categories\(^7\).

It can be argued that the reason for such immutability would be the appealing aspect of functionality for any such means of classification. Indeed, this view asserts that genre is not only functional in some vague sense for identifying type; it also serves as an enduring tool for the arrangement of literary texts which accommodates both the author and the reader for selection, enjoyment and comprehension. The purposes of such classification may seem self-evident:

Such conventions function as a set of expectations...a set of constrictive conventions and codes...a kind of implicit contract between reader and writer [which enables] the reader to make the work intelligible\(^8\).

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1 NSW Board of Studies English 7-10 Syllabus (2005).
2 Other states follow the lead of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2007), especially in the context of the proposed National Curriculum.
4 Most critics locate the end of this Western literary stasis at the English Renaissance, so that the last 500 years of gradual generic change must be weighed against thousands of years of relative inertia. By comparison, recent decades have seen the rate of change accelerated: Dubrow (1982:59-65).
5 Frye (1957:35).
6 This has been extensively detailed by authors such as Abrams (1988); Frye (1957).
7 Freedman & Medway (1994:1).
This idea of a social contract which facilitates intelligibility offers a framework of understanding whereby genre can be considered as the established formula to which the author writes and by which the reader decodes the text. This is its conventionality, which can be understood also as a practical usefulness, or utilitarianism. If it is conventionally read, then it is also facilitative for ease of communication. There is nothing in the conventional-utilitarian view to suggest that genre needs to change once it is established.

**Genre**

2. The semiotic view

What is missing from this conventional-utilitarian understanding is that it doesn't offer any insight into genre as comprising more than mere static, categorical distinctions:

Sharing a common language nature…literary genres…have been studied in terms of their specific literary and artistic features, in terms of the differences that distinguish one from another within the realm of literature.

Rather than being mere discrete boundaries, genres can be seen as having many common features. One of these common features is the fundamental nature of genre in its arbitrariness, as understood through semiotic theory. Put briefly, semiotics is present in much contemporary theory across disciplines, which breaks with traditional ways of viewing social constructs such as genre:

There has been a fundamental realignment in how...knowledge is assumed to be constituted (which) has coincided with a falling off of intellectual security in what we know and what it means to know...a shift in epistemology, in the theorising of knowledge...the question of how we build knowledge.

This epistemological shift prioritises an understanding of texts as constructed and arbitrary, following Derrida's assertion that meaning derives from the "trace structure of the sign (semiotic) as embedded in a context...the meaning of a sign is not complete in itself (but bears) the trace of the signs which surround it". This intertextuality, where meaning is derived from arbitrary contextualization, signification and from meaning derived from other texts beyond the specific text being read, is at the centre of newer genre theory:

Genre indicates the formulaic and the conventional (but) any text is shaped and organised by its relation to generic structures. Genre is a universal dimension of textuality...through generically organised

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1 This is my proposed term as a paraphrase of Abrams (1988).
3 Frow (2006:1).
knowledges the operation in a context selects the relevant information and gives compatible shape or from a text infers a relevant context\(^1\).

Meaning, therefore, is codified by predictable knowledge structures, which are constructed to fit social priorities, so that “all meaning is genre based”\(^2\). In this way genre actively shapes knowledges and meaning as instances of “symbolic action”\(^3\). This of course is related to the proposition of schemata, or “background knowledge...pre-existing knowledge structures (formed) in memory or in the contexts of our basic experiences”\(^4\). In other words, we read any text, not only in relation to texts which we have already read, but also according to certain pre-existing ways of reading which are deterministic for meaning\(^5\). These internalized ways of reading permit us to make sense of new material as having a relationship to other texts, however fragmentary or novel the new material is:

The schema is what allows us to infer the whole from the part...knowledge is organised...genre makes patterns of meaning relative to particular communicative functions and situations\(^6\).

By special application to non-fiction, including history and biography, this reading of genre considers the arrangement of facts, sources and narrative as being equally arbitrary and deterministic of meaning\(^7\). Usually this type of knowledge is intrinsic and considered as intuitive, whereas it is perhaps more correctly seen as embedded within its generative discourse and thus culturally produced\(^8\). The role of the text within any genre is representative, in that it is a product of this cultural discourse, and it thereby reproduces and perpetuates it seamlessly: “that is, to naturalise it, by relating it to the world as defined and ordered by the prevailing culture”\(^9\). This includes not only subjectivities, ideologies and diverse experience, but also the very linearity as embodied in the typical narrative: all are subject to interpretation and can be negotiated as boundaries of inclusion and exclusion\(^10\). There is then the ultimate conclusion that there is no one, unitary historical narrative\(^11\), but potentially an infinite variety of alternative histories which can be written: “There is not one single history, but rather histories different in their type, rhythm, mode of inscription-intervallic, differentiated histories”\(^12\).

The challenge to traditional genre from such theory is fundamental, since the very substance of biography’s non-fictional status is thus undermined by the semiotic perception that it is entirely or predominantly negotiated dialogue:

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\(^1\) Frow (2006:1-2,84).
\(^2\) Hirsch (1967:76).
\(^3\) Frow (2006:2).
\(^7\) Currie (1998:78-79).
\(^8\) Halliday (1978:2).
\(^12\) Althusser, as quoted in: Currie (1998:79).
“genre makes things happen by actively shaping the way we view the world...genres create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility...texts do not belong to genres, but are, rather, uses of them”. It also tends to the ultimate conclusion of constructedness:

The epistemological challenge to biography (from) poststructuralism and postmodernism (is) if language cannot transparently convey reality, if the self is a fictive construct or mere multiplicity of subject positions, if narrative itself imposes a false coherence on events, then no biographical account can be in any sense ‘true’.

The significance of course, of this position is that not only does it form a binary position from traditional thinking about biography, but it also dominates literary theory, and thus the way biography is taught at the tertiary level.

Genre
3. The mutability view

Consistent with the notion of genre as a negotiation of reality is the idea that genre is subject to change, as with any social construct: “genre is not the permanent product of a singular origin, but the temporary by-product of an ongoing process”. This suggests that genre is predominantly socially determined, which in turn suggests that along with the perception of genre as arbitrary and conventional there is the understanding that genre serves to fix texts only as long as its users wish it to.

There are opposing pressures, then, inherent in generic frameworks. Through conventionality genre should resist change, since literary works seem to be statically contained and located in predictable codifications. Through arbitrariness, genre is decided in response to social need. The contemporary reality is that overall, genres no longer seem to be fixed, a circumstance which has demonstrably and dramatically changed, as recent “history furnishes example after example of disparity of crossbreeds and mutants”.

Historically, this is unusual. From the ancient Greek system of classification, which was limited to three artistic expressions in verse the diversity and sheer number of generic divisions available today in literature is huge and seems to defy limitations. For instance, a sample of major online book retailers shows a range of genres numbering from twelve to over thirty, which are then split into literally hundreds of sub-genres. A major authority on

1 Frow (2006:2).
3 Altman (1999:54).
4 Altman (1999:16-17).
5 The original ‘triad’ of Greek genres referred only to the poetic forms of epic, lyric and drama: Frow (2006:51-58).
7 Amazon.com, for instance which is the world’s largest book seller, lists its books by genre. Other international publishers have similar comprehensive listings. Sourced 5-6-2008 at: http://www.amazon.com/b/ref=sv_b_1/104-0811381-3185500?ie=UTF8&node=1000
biography also lists the variety of life writing genres and sub-genres numbering over one hundred categories for this one area of literary production alone\(^1\). The distinction needs to be made here, however, that literary genres seem to have developed outwards, with generic overlaps and blurring, while life writing seems to have merely diversified within, and can still be described as containing the elements of itself, while resisting fiction. That is, fiction has always appropriated elements of biography\(^2\) for stylistics, even credibility, whereas biography retains remarkable generic integrity, and seems to have remained immune to the “contamination” of fiction to any meaningful degree\(^3\).

This is significant, given the obvious pressure which has been placed on genre in recent decades, such that the number and variety of literary genres overall has grown exponentially, and yet it will be asserted here and evidence presented for, the claim that life writing has resisted this type of manipulation. That is, biography remains fairly constant, despite the apparent growth in genre, which is indicative of a complex society: “the number of genres in any society... depends on the complexity and diversity of [that] society“\(^4\). There is evidently a vehicular mechanism for generic innovation which promotes creativity but which also ossifies the distinction within literary classification systems between fiction and non-fiction.

This mechanism for change has been explained as typically being a result of the variations between texts within the same genre\(^5\). Indeed, while textual difference between genres seems to be assumed, individual texts within the same genre are also distinguishable from each other\(^6\). Although texts are written to a generic code to optimise coherence, they are also written and read to express difference\(^7\), but that difference is made meaningful only by generic links in the first place\(^8\). Originality is not only desirable; it also seems to be unavoidable. Indeed, a reader responds to an author’s codified text for originality as much as intelligibility: “genres are instances of repetition and difference [and] difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre“\(^9\).

Thus the process of change for genre has been described as evolutionary rather than revolutionary, in that literary categories change from within, through textual variation which cross-fertilises other texts\(^10\). Three levels of systematic change have been identified:

\(^1\) Jolly (2001: table of contents).
\(^2\) Richetti (1996:9-10).
\(^3\) Hamilton (2007:121-123).
\(^4\) Freedman & Medway (1994a:36).
\(^7\) Kress (2004:84).
\(^8\) Neale (1980: 46-47).
\(^10\) With the proviso that genre is socially ordered, it is not ‘survival of the fittest’ in the ordinary biological sense: Gledhill (1985: 59).
First…innovations are added to an existent corpus rather than replacing redundant elements, it is cumulative. Second…these innovations must be basically consistent with what is already present, it is 'conservative'. Third…these processes lead to the crystallisation of specialist sub-genres, it involves differentiation⁴.

It can be seen then, that change within and challenge to genre most typically occurs from diversity of texts within the genre itself. Alternatively, it could be suggested that as the number of texts and authors increases within any genre, the pressure on generic limits through the incidence of originality within these texts will also grow. Allowing that this type of generic change seems to be inevitable produces the consequential idea that perhaps the original boundaries and functions of texts within any genre are susceptible to re-interpretation or negotiation:

Prior to the nineteenth century, it was assumed that the laws of genre were fixed and stable and that they provided objective criteria for evaluation. Today it is commonplace to acknowledge their arbitrary, conventional, and historical nature².

Indeed, recent genre theory builds on the fact that the notion of genre as a fixed and determinate category has been permanently overturned by the explosion in textual types and overlapping of genres, with the creation of complete multiple genres and sub-genres within each category³. This calls into question the very basis upon which genre is created and sustained in the first place. In response to this phenomenon, it has been observed that the multiplicity of genres reflects social change, such that:

The cycles and transformations of genres can be seen as a response to political, social and economic conditions [and] can be seen as embodying certain values and ideological assumptions… genres from a particular era [reflect] values which were dominant at the time ⁴.

If, then the pluralism within and multiplicity of genre is a reflection of social conditions, including ideology, it calls into question the very credentials from which genre claims its authority. To analyse genre beyond the simplest lexical level, is to investigate the degree to which genre responds to social norms and to which it is constructed by these expectations⁵. In essence this is questioning whether: "a genre is ultimately an abstract conception rather than something that exists empirically in the world"⁶. Whatever support there may have been for treating genre as an empirical representation of literary types, it may in fact be nothing more than arbitrary divisions serving a prevailing ideology:

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⁵ University of Toronto: English Library (2007).
⁶ Abercrombie (1996:45).
Recently, structuralists and feminist theorists, among others, have focused on the way in which generically defined structures may operate to construct particular ideologies and values, and to encourage reassuring and conservative interpretations of a given text. Genres only exist in so far as a social group declares and enforces the rules that constitute them. Different genres are concerned to establish different world views.

Genre

4. The discourse view

This link between genre and social power, including ideology and the ability to enforce a particular world-view, has broader implications for the idea of genre as a form of social construction in a more general sense, which calls for a discursive approach. As previously stated, genre serves to create a link of meaning between author and reader, but this link of intelligibility is produced within a defined, mutually understood and participated-in, cultural interaction. That is, genre makes sense to the reader and author in a cultural context, not in some isolated abstraction. Consistency of understanding reflects the nature of genres as “categories set up by the interaction of textual features and reading practices which shape and limit the meanings the reader can make within a text”. It seems obvious for instance, that the distinctions between film genres can be accessed only by people for whom there is a prior, working knowledge of what film is first of all, plus a familiarity with different types of film according to genre.

While semiotics tends to the discourse view in much of its theory, it stops short at a fuller understanding of semantics-pragmatics and discourse. For instance, beyond schemata is the understanding of script and frame:

Frame is a fixed, static pattern...shared by everyone within a social group...like a prototype version...the assumed elements of a frame are generally not stated...it is pragmatic, where the reader uses a pre-existing knowledge structure to create an interpretation of what is not stated...script is a pre-existing knowledge structure involving event sequences.

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1 Casey (1993: 312).
3 Livingstone (1990:155).
5 Moon (1992:60).
Frame and script, therefore establish further the idea of constructedness in social action. The notion of genre as social action-discourse is well established, following Foucault. Genre is perceived as abrupt and perhaps entirely arbitrary rather than gradual, but the general sense of constructedness is consistent with the semiotic view. Indeed, the discursive view proposes that what appear to be natural formations, such as generic understandings, are most typically linguistically framed:

Discursive formations often appear to be natural or internal properties, but are actually culturally constituted and variable...genre is a system of classification, a site of interpretation and a marker of cultural values...genre does not exist in abstract isolation but in intertextual relationships.

This “linguistic” approach is interesting in that it looks at language formation of world-view. It also foregrounds the ways that genres “orient attention to the social world, so that generic configuration derives from social/cultural configuration”. Genres may also help to shape such values. The relationship (can be seen) as reciprocal: “a genre develops according to social conditions; transformations in genre and texts can influence and reinforce social conditions”. The emphasis also widens to contend that genres “have come to be defined as typified rhetorical ways communicants come to recognise and act in all kinds of situations, literary and non-literary”. Even the name of the author causes a discursive dilemma:

The author's name remains at the contours of texts-separating the one from the other, defining their form, and characterising their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and a culture.

This Barthesian line of reasoning is most often understood as prioritising the reader’s response to the text over context of the authorial production: “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author”. The signification of intentionality may seem fairly unproblematic when a biography signals its intention through genre. However, in the context of much literary and historical theory contemporarily, intentionality has been called into question to such a degree that it is acceptable to argue that the reader’s decoding of the text must assume primacy over the author’s intended communication. This is particularly true in the assertions made for ‘The

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6 Thwaites et al. (1994: 100).
Intentional (and Affective) Fallacy\(^1\); which theory set has been very influential in literary criticism in recent decades, asserting that: "there is the fallacy that ideation precedes interpretation"\(^2\). The supposed effect for genre, and biography in particular, is that such theory undermines generic integrity since truth value is also contextually determined by "regimes of truth" independently of authorial intention\(^3\). In particular, the Barthesian neologistic:

\[\text{Biographeme} \text{ (or minimal unit of biographical detail) breaks with the teleology implicit in the conventional biographical narrative account...in the same manner of those who have lost their nearest and dearest...by discrete images, by association, invocatively)\]®.

Ultimately this type of reasoning presents the claim of biographical truth, and therefore any claims for generic integrity and foundation of non-fiction, as entirely negotiable and unstable. Bakhtin’s Marxist version of the unreliable “inner world and thought shaped by the word”\(^5\) was vindicated by this Barthesian assault on biography, especially in Barthes’ model autobiography Barthes by Barthes\(^6\), where linearity, narrative and existence are meant to begin and end with the intertextuality of the reader\(^7\). This type of theory leads to the conclusion that biography cannot be treated seriously as non-fiction, but that it represents: “a kind of displaced spiritual writing in which the self is presented through fiction”\(^8\). This is why:

For a long period from the advent of the New Criticism in the 1940s and throughout the heady era of Parisian theory from the late 1960s, biography was widely regarded with scepticism and suspicion by academics within the humanities and social sciences in Australia and elsewhere. If the author was truly dead, why bother about the life?\(^9\)

This would tend to the idea that not only genre, but perhaps biography itself is redundant. It also suggests that one reading or interpretation of a life is as valid as any other\(^10\).

**Genre**

5. The critical and discourse analysis challenge to these claims

There are several critical responses to this type of theory. The first response responds to errors of internal logic, such as the increased level of technology which is readily taken up by life writing participants and which presents “signs

\(^1\) First articulated in: Wimsatt & Beardsley (1946); but commented on in: Bennett & Royle (2004:6-8); Earnshaw (1996:54-58); Hawthorn (1998:4-8;105-112).
\(^3\) Mittell (2004:13).
\(^6\) Barthes (1994).
\(^7\) Zurbrugg & Burt (2000:19).
\(^8\) Elbaz & Egan, quoted in: McCooey (1996:5).
of the authorial presence as never before\textsuperscript{1}. Even the “cover of Barthes’ (autobiography) ironically demonstrates that it is impossible to stop time (or) to remove all traces of the author from the text\textsuperscript{2}. Indeed, the foundational notion of constructed “regimes of truth” can be inverted as applying to the very success of postmodernism, such that it now occupies the very academe position it sought to criticise, and it should therefore be seen as no more than just another version of reality contingent upon social construction\textsuperscript{3}. Therefore it is inherently unreliable, using its own definitions of truth insistence and intransigence. As another irony, biography is inclusive: it is the only chronicle that generically aims to chart lives of all types, even those who seek to make a name for themselves by undermining it\textsuperscript{4}.

Methodology is another area of criticism. For example, one of the central tenets of this type of theory, that of “the instability of definitive factual truth where people are concerned, especially recollections or memories of events...had always been accepted by biographers anyway”\textsuperscript{5}. Historical theory seems to have already covered the problems of methodology by making allowances for subjectivity and contestable truth under Marwick’s rules of evidence\textsuperscript{6}. The fact that biography is not typically taken up by history departments, but rather by English literature, as evidenced previously, probably explains the gap between evidential understandings, despite Foucault’s impressive historiography\textsuperscript{7}.

Whatever appeal Barthesian-Foucauldian theory has for literature in general, and specifically for fictional genres, in more recent discussion it has been shown that the theory has little or no relevance for biography\textsuperscript{8}. Its original and most convincing application was for poetry, wherein it rejected the interpretation of a poem through a reading of the biography or life history of the author as being ultimately more efficacious. This was later extended in a wider discussion of literature in general, to a rejection of any “real, final meaning of the work (text) as intended by the author” and discoverable by the reader or critic\textsuperscript{9}. The whole concept of subjectivity and objectivity is not only largely redundant; it has been worked over in the literature to the point of exhaustion\textsuperscript{10}. The straw man of subjectivity as an ally of fiction should be regarded as a tenet of fiction itself\textsuperscript{11}. That is why the model autobiography of Barthes failed to lodge itself as a seminal text. It “was and remained largely unsightly blemish in the history of biographical narrative, a history that went back thousands of years”\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{1} Zurbrugg & Burt (2000:19).
\textsuperscript{2} Zurbrugg & Burt (2000:19).
\textsuperscript{3} Burke (1998:87-95).
\textsuperscript{4} Hunter (1996:12-15).
\textsuperscript{5} Garber (1996:175-177).
\textsuperscript{6} Marwick (2001:1989).
\textsuperscript{7} Kress (2004:84-87).
\textsuperscript{8} Downey (2007:149-152); Encyclopaedia Britannica online (2007).
\textsuperscript{9} Bennett & Royle (2004:6).
\textsuperscript{10} Butler (2002:116).
\textsuperscript{11} Butler (2002); Hamilton (2007).
\textsuperscript{12} Hamilton (2007:211).
Indeed, the attempts by Barthes to extend his almost singularly unilateral interpretation of biography as fiction to a practical exercise famously foundered on the rock of generic contradiction: it sought to empirically demonstrate that conventions of truth and lineal narrative were fabrications; only to provide evidence for the opposite conclusion⁴. After all, there is a fundamental causative link between being born and the rest of a person’s life, and this temporal causal-continuity determines the sequence of a life-regardless of how it is remembered. This cannot be altered even in narrative, since it is a common and fixed experienced “inherent life-line structure” which underlies any reading of a biography, and is most certainly and demonstrably not the product of any type of construction⁵. This instance tends to undermine undermine the self-assurance of absolutism, such as Derrida’s assertion that “(such) history is a narrative construction of the past, not the past itself...perceiving and remembering are themselves constructions and reconstructions”³. It is possible, therefore, that not everything in biography is pure construction.

It also undermines the tenet that: “All speech is constrained by its occasion and by the genre within which it is framed”⁴. If this was true, generic innovation and questioning, as exemplified in the Foucauldian approach, is a logical impossibility. It might be more logical to propose as a central feature of genre, that it is fixed and deterministic only if its users wish it to remain so. That is, genre is a function of intentionality, rather than deterministic of speech. Indeed, the study of linguistics would reject as prescriptive the Foucauldian type of reasoning or assertion. Briefly put, the linguistic view is that speech may very well correspond to genre or occasion, but that ultimately all “linguistic interaction is locally negotiated”⁵. That is, the purposes or intention of the interlocutors or textual participants are agreed upon according to need. Context is a function of need, and it may alter agency, but the communicative need is paramount⁶. Patterns of linguistic behaviour develop into recognisable conventions, which build on human nature, but these are only altered if they prove inadequate⁷. This is consistent with the idea that regularity in textual form and function, which is the traditional means of identifying texts within any genre, can be additionally viewed as being merely “surface traces of a different kind of underlying regularity...deriving from the similarity in the social action undertaken”⁸.

Discourse analysis is a methodological approach to the study of language which evolved through linguistics, and in particular through the discipline of sociolinguistics⁹. It offers insight into the fundamental in human experience as as articulated through instances of communication, or “texts”¹⁰. There are some overlaps with the Foucauldian type of discourse theory, such as the

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⁴ Frow (1990:1).
⁵ Eckert (1990:121-123).
⁷ Goffman (1967:12).
generalistic understanding that “discourse is a construct...there are different sorts of knowledge to be shared and different ways of sharing”. However, the presence of discrepancies, especially in metalanguage usage, point to a philosophical (if not methodological) irreconcilability. For example, the Foucauldian “linguistic turn” presumes a correspondence for approaches between the fields of linguistics and social (and literary-historical) studies, which does not exist. This is exacerbated by a radically different usage of terms such as discourse and genre. Speech genres, for instance, as articulated by Bakhtin refer to the characteristics of “spheres of language (with) relatively stable types of utterances”. In linguistics this is developed into ideas of speech acts and speech communities which refer to recurring recurring patterns in linguistic behaviour by individuals and by communities linked by notions of identity and solidarity, but which are determined by agential decisions beyond acculturalisation. Discourse, similarly, is sometimes described as “language above the sentence or above the clause”.

Discourse (or) language in use (is) a process which is socially situated...which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices (it) both reproduces and constructs afresh particular social-discursive practices.

Yet discourse is also linked to the idea of cultural literacy and competency, so that it is more comprehensively viewed as the totality of experience, the sum of all linguistic exchanges, responses to new data and creativity, from which any utterance can be generated. In linguistics, language in use is studied, as it is actually experienced, rather than as it is presumed to be used: it is descriptive not prescriptive.

Thus, it could be claimed that any crossover between these notions of discourse is superficial, and that a fundamental, philosophical divide remains. The most elementary difference is that discourse analysis proper foregrounds individual agency as enacted amid, tied causatively to, but still independent of, cultural construction or generic predictability. A strict Foucauldian

3 Compare the glossaries of Crystal (1995); Fromkin et al (2009); or Holmes (2008).
5 Austin (1962:63-75).
12 Holmes (2008); Crystal (1995).
approach has the tendency of explaining all behaviour as being determined by
generic social codifications, which sounds suspiciously like a universal
explanation and behavioural determinism\(^1\). In this view, even behavioural
aberrations are predominantly seen as expressions of codification through
variegated experience\(^2\). Discourse analysis proper, especially in its links to
foundational psycholinguistics and ethnolinguistics\(^3\), invites a much more
complex reading of linguistic behaviour.

A comparison can be made for the way in which the linguistic behavioural
determinism/prescriptivism of Skinner has been largely discredited by the later
linguistic innateness/descriptivism of Chomsky\(^4\). Similarly, contemporary DA
looks for commonalities across speech communities which explain not only
recurring systems of linguistic behaviour but which also enable an
understanding of idiosyncratic usages\(^5\).

For instance the narrow prescriptivism of Skinner refers to the acquisition of
language as devolving predominantly upon imitation and reinforcement; that
is, stimulus external to the individual\(^6\). By contrast, Chomsky’s assessment of
language capacity identifies that “language… with its Universal Grammar… is
grounded in the human genome as are all other human competencies”\(^7\); that
is, it is innate, a biological faculty. The language facility in humans is
genetically present, operated on by language exposure, but it is also capable
of “creativity and novelty”\(^8\) and these characteristics are not explainable
through mere cultural exposure or external stimuli. That is, it “is not an instinct
but a capacity”, developed in response to stimulus, as if it was “hard-wired
into the brain”; the brain is not a “tabula rasa (clean slate)”\(^9\). This reference to
the nature of language and its acquisition therefore undermines the
exclusively deterministic and prescriptive ideas behind much of social/generic
theory.

As well as these foundational psycholinguistic ideas, DA is also informed by
research into ethnography-ethnolinguistics. Some relevant ideas of
commonality across speech communities are the theories relating to the
Maxims/Co-operative Principle\(^10\), Phatic Communion\(^11\), Cohesion-
Coherence\(^12\), Narratology\(^13\) and Speech Acts\(^14\). These have reference to any
linguistic transaction, including extended texts and contexts such as genre
and biography. For instance, Grice explains that all successful

\(^{1}\) Burke (1998:39-45).

\(^{2}\) Crookes (1979).


\(^{10}\) Grice (1975).

\(^{11}\) Malinowski (1923).

\(^{12}\) Halliday & Hasan (1976).

\(^{13}\) Labov (1972).

\(^{14}\) Austin (1962).
communications, regardless of language or cultural context, rely on one assumed certainty, which is the Co-operative Principle:

Conventional meaning and unconventional meaning (both) assume to a considerable extent an intuitive understanding of the meaning in certain contexts…a rough general principle (exists), namely: make your conversational contribution such as is required (contextually) …following the supermaxim of Quality…do not say what you believe to be false, do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence1.

Conventional meaning is that which corresponds to standard social norms of language use, and which is easily or semantically understood. However, it is evident that people can also understand non-standard or unconventional forms of language at the pragmatic level. Utterances expressive of irony, humour, exaggeration, understatement and lying are unconventional uses of implicit agreement (implicature) between speaker and listener and the utterance is accepted as such, but with the understanding that non-agreement is a betrayal of trust, or a “violation…and/or flouting of the maxims and the Co-operative Principle”2. It is obvious then, that language and its conventions are manipulated by the users of language, not the other way round.

As another function of language, Malinowski proposes that a central aim of communication is the emotional-phatic bonding between persons, such that the meaningful content itself is almost, or at least proportionately, dispensable. Biographical information is integral to this sharing process:

Accounts of the speaker’s views and life history create bonds (it) fulfills a function to which the meaning of its words is almost completely irrelevant (it) has the purpose of establishing a common sentiment…an atmosphere of sociability in the fact of the personal communion of people3.

That is, besides the informational content of shared biographical utterances, there is an individualistic response which is emotional communicative need. Similarly, the narrative mode of utterance also has a high affective role and content. Labov’s studies of AAE or Ebonics4 found repeated stylised systems of narrative, but he also found an oral culture which prioritised innovation and rhetorical skill with a high emotive content:

Narratives from leaders of vernacular peer groups…are widely recognised for their verbal skills of…performance in argument, ritual insults…gifted story telling is highly regarded…typically ordered in semantic inferential…temporal sequence…as well as structures of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result and coda5.

1 Grice (1975:41-43).
3 Malinowski (1923:296-297); italics are my emphasis.
4 African American English.
5 Labov (1972: 2-13).
The causal link between events is essential as a feature of linearity: such that some degree of adherence to temporal linearity is also a cohesive device. That is, events must be related in (typically the) actual order of occurrence, or else they make no sense, semantically. By contrast, if a narrative is disjunctive for linearity, as for instance happens when tangents occur in a narrative sequence, this may still be coherent if the background knowledge of the hearer matches that of the speaker but there is a risk that the continuity will be disrupted and the narrative will be incoherent. This explains why the Barthesian departure from the linearity of narrative was largely ignored. This is not a construction; it is simple referentiality to events as experienced in direct temporal sequence. The stylistics of the narrative most certainly are socially reflective, as are values and meaning derived from the cultural placement of the coda and other interpretive frames, but the essential narratorial need is a common, sub-ideological communicative response to actual events. The narrator as biographer is also the implicit witness or knower of these events, and this person’s account relies on this lineal sense-building:

Biography typically develops in a way similar to a realistic novel—a coherent, unified voice claims to present the truth about a life, while omniscient narration, repeating themes and symbols, and a linear chronological presentation of events provide readers with the illusion of totality and closure. The cause-and-effect linearity implied by the chronological plot is considered a reliable way of ordering the subject’s life, and the author a trustworthy narrator who understands the relationship between the private self and the public world.

This reliance upon form and function does not diminish the power of individual style, but rather forms the generic narratorial basis upon which invention can distinguish oratory skill. Such socially valued personal oratories are found across oral traditions in most if not all cultures, and biography is deemed to have descended from these oral traditions. It is odd, therefore, if not impossible to deduce that highly codified or socially constructed language can merely be deterministic and regular when it also values individual innovation of neologisms, variations and collocations or general creativity. Indeed, language use is considered as being highly idiosyncratic and personal, even after socialising influences are taken into account:

The uniqueness of individuals, arising out of differences in their memory, personality, intelligence, social background and personal experience, makes distinctiveness of (language) style inevitable in everyone.

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Personality and the consideration of individual choice then, is an important factor in linguistics for the ways in which language is used, over and above socialised norms. There is, however, behind language choice the central communicative need, which takes priority over the diverse forms of language. Therefore this need (function) is causative of convention (form). That is, convention is a product or expression of function, and the function, or communicative need of language comes before the forms. It would appear that in prioritising form of language (or its conventionality and arbitrariness) social theorists have put the proverbial cart before the horse.

One essential function of communication is the need to represent events to others: and this is a task of surprising complexity. Additional to the personal variations in language use, Labov also identifies the essential component of narrative linearity, in which the nature of meaning is contingent upon temporal order. This sense generation, or semantic meaning derived from lineal sequencing is taken up in the theory of Cohesion-Coherence by Halliday and Hasan. While extensive background knowledge is required for making sense from isolated recorded events, the lineal sequence of information in any extended utterance also predicts actual time-event order. That is, causation and sequencing are generative of coherence. This is, again, explainable as a representation of real world events, however much the interpretation of external meaning is reliant upon ideology or world view. Biographical narratives which seek to disrupt the timeline of a life risk the absence of cohesion between elements, and this causes a lack of coherence.

This performative action of sense building is direct confirmation of Austin’s theory of Speech Acts, in which it is asserted that (especially in regard to performatives):

Utterances do not merely state some fact…or describe some state of affairs, but…rather perform an action…in which felicity conditions are operative…a conventional procedure has a conventional effect (through) the uttering of certain words by certain people in certain conditions (and) participants involved must in fact have those thoughts and feelings…for the inauguration of certain consequential effect.

In the case of a conventional format such as life writing, this principle can be applied to mean that, as a speech act, its generic integrity is of force because it satisfies the intrinsic felicity conditions as contracted by its social placement and validation. It achieves this status by explicitly invoking the authority of a factually evidenced life: that is, the author of the life narrative overtly undertakes to represent that life in a truthful manner. The narrative’s conventional force lies in the fact that it is understood and accepted as non-fiction to the best of the author’s ability to represent it as such. Additionally, it

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1 Holmes (2008:270).
3 Halliday & Hasan (1976).
undertakes to represent that particular life in such a way that it is distinctive from all other lives, and thus in intent and production it celebrates uniqueness. It is in this representation of uniqueness that the fundamental life writing variance from the socially constructed view is shown most clearly. At the heart of the social act that is life writing, the author seeks to demonstrate how the individual agent achieved a unique (read triumphal) life *despite*, not *because of*, social forces/acculturalisation/construction. Life writing therefore, presents a conventional system of meaning foregrounding the individual, which may very well run counter to other, established cultural norms of meaning in which the individual is subsumed to a greater social ‘good’.

Additional to this major feature of biography is the pillar of trust. In much the same way as DA implicitly or explicitly identifies trust and sincerity as the basis of co-operation between speaker and listener in each of these represented theories, it seems that the idea of a contract between reader and author for the negotiation and reading of a biographical text as some measurable form of truth is demonstrably evident. Indeed, there is in the frame of genre an understanding that this is the case, however implicit. That is, there is the same contract of trust in any text which can be categorised as biographical. There is conventionality in the lexical items which accompany the published text. Typically as part of the text’s title appear items such as: “the official Biography”, “an Autobiography”, “based on a true story”, “based on real events”, “my story” (etc). This is not the same as an explicit, directive statement which unequivocally demands and delineates trust. There is, for instance, no statement which positions the reader to the effect of: “this text is true to the best of the author’s ability, and you are required to accept it as truth”. Rather an entailment is contained within the genre itself. Indeed, the applied meaning of such a generic social contract, implicit or otherwise, is that texts are written to a mutually agreed upon and comprehensible code. The code extends to any text which seeks to represent another person’s life: “No (biography) tells the whole truth. But there is an understanding that underlies a (biography)-it sends a signal to the reader that ‘I’m going to do everything I can to be as truthful as I can’. The biographical code demands of both author and a reader the “implicit pact of trust”. While autobiography has been singled out by commentators as a special type of discursive contract, this argument is negated by the simple fact that any instance of biographical writing has a presumed reader with an understanding of authorial accountability. In autobiography this includes an accountability to self:

The reflective autobiographers...try to be radically truthful...challenging and depicting their inner, self-conscious selves...as a drama of the moral self...to prod, investigate, question, and openly debate in the current, present, still-living sense.

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1 Lejeune (1989); Harris & Webby (1992:193-5).
2 Freadman (2002).
Consequently, texts are deliberately and consciously selected and read from within that code. Whatever innovation may exist in any given text, generic reconcilability must still be adhered to. Mutual intelligibility between genre and text enables the reader to access and assess the text for consistency and intention, as well as meaningful variation. More specifically then, the genre of life writing makes meaning only if the participants agree on the ‘terms’ of this social contract: “genres only exist in so far as a social group declares and enforces the rules that constitute them”\(^1\). It should be noted here that the notion of ‘intention’ has a specific application to biography in the context of generic assignation. That is, the biographical author signifies that the text will be a non-fictional narrative of a real person’s life through a deliberate selection of generic code. In all these discourse theories, there is strict codification of utterances which facilitates social literacy and trust, emotional bonding and identity. Mobility and creativity in utterances of narrative are not only permitted, but socially valued—so long as the author is clear about their intentionality. This indicates that generic boundaries are fixed to some degree but also responsive to individual needs and to a variety of contexts reflective of diverse lives, and permissive of flexibility and agential discretion.

It is more likely then that genre and life writing are not merely products of social conditioning but rather socially agreed forms which are built on something more fundamental. They are simply too ubiquitous and too highly developed as items of consciousness and priorities to be merely learnt behaviours. If there is pressure from social theory to overturn genre, then it can be understood as an attempt to make a minority interest into a reality, but it doesn’t seem to have worked:

Realist history and…film making, and newspaper reporting simply continued on their way in the era of postmodern theory; they had a high level of general acceptability, so that many of those attracted to postmodernist art and theory must have found themselves living in two opposing epistemological worlds\(^2\).

Indeed, there is also the essential philosophical gulf, which seems to be irreconcilable. DA takes the stance that most communication occurs seamlessly, as a result of conventions which assist to make creativity not only possible but also a valuable individual resource\(^3\). When miscommunication occurs it is considered to be remarkable, and therefore also an opportunity to generate further understanding. This type of event is called a “rich point”\(^4\). It seems more objective than the Foucauldian approach which seems to have a premise that any conventionality is necessarily ‘bad’:

The Foucauldian sense…that the discursive formation is (exemplified) by the evil use of metaphysical history does not logically support the

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\(^1\) Hodge & Kress (1988:7).
\(^2\) Butler (2002:42).
idea that metaphysical history is evil in itself, any more than the use of a pillow as a murder weapon reflects badly on pillows in general\textsuperscript{1}.

By contrast, “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish”\textsuperscript{2}. If this is the case, then it might be possible to evidence further from a range of published biographical texts that a disparity between the academic position and the wider social generic understanding exists. To do so, a set of testable claims can be suggested, drawing on DA principles. These can be expressed as:

- Biography is a linguistic transaction first and foremost; its literary genre should be considered as a product of predictable patterns of utterances within a frame and schemata.
- Biography utilizes a primal human need for trust in recounting actual events as an essential item of phatic communion: truth is a condition of human relationships.
- Genre as expressed through biography can be modified via specific social construction, but cannot overthrow the essential condition of truth.
- Genre must be assigned in some way, such that the text is a performative, authoritative text: in practice this consolidates the truth conditions of biography as a highly codified text.
- While genre is understood as arbitrary and conventional, and therefore potentially mutable, it is apparent that biography in the hands of its participants is socially valued precisely because of its agreed high rate of immutability.
- The author is foregrounded in autobiography, while the subject is foregrounded in biography.
- Subjectivity is desirable, as is innovation and individuality, but it is subordinate to felicity conditions of truth.
- The pact of trust must be adhered to unless:
  - The author signifies that the maxim of quality is flouted or violated for effects of irony, humour, and exaggeration (etc).
  - The reader is aware of this deliberate strategy and accepts this as a condition of that trust.

**Testing the limits of genre theory**

**Instance 1: historical fiction and biography**

Historical-biographical fiction is considered to be a fairly recent categorisation of what is actually an ancient practice of narrating a stylised version of history\textsuperscript{3}. This form of “renarratisation”, in the Foucauldian sense, assumes a conflation of self and invention\textsuperscript{4}. In practice, however there seems to be a very adequate general literary understanding of its dynamics:

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{1}Currie (1998:92).
\textsuperscript{2}Freedman & Medway (1994a:24).
\textsuperscript{3}Fuchs (2004:78-92); Adamson (1999:v-viii).
\textsuperscript{4}Fuchs (2004:139).
Historical fiction evokes a particular time period by focussing on a well-known person or event or on an ordinary person living in historical times...biographical fiction stories focus on the life of a specific person in which the author creates dialogue rather than documentation\footnote{Adamson (1999:vii-viii, genre index, 295-330). As noted earlier, this is standard categorisation for publishers and book sellers.}.

It is clear that in the English literary tradition, the idea of separation between myth and recognisable history became an important social norm before it became a priority elsewhere\footnote{The so-called “scientific history” which was standardized in 19th Century Europe, especially Germany, should be seen as a product of much earlier Enlightenment historical and literary development in England (Marwick:1981).}. This divergence between conflicting purposes is nowhere clearer than in the development of 18th Century English literature\footnote{Batchelor (2003:15).}, particularly evident in the development of the English novel and satire\footnote{McKeon (2002).}. It is at this time, at least in the English literary tradition that formal distinctions were first made between the fanciful, creative elaborations on historical themes which were becoming popular with writers of the period, and adherence to non-fiction in the retelling of persons’ lives\footnote{Paulson (1968:3-11)}. It is claimed that this distinction may have taken another century to become a permanent feature of social literacy\footnote{Easson (1991:1)}.:

The link between the historical discursive formation...and the rise of the English novel is simply another type of historical discursive formation (the early novels) could plausibly be read as histories when they appeared, but were subsequently assimilated to the tradition of the novel\footnote{Mayer (1997:6)}.:

Fiction and history are kindred forms. Indeed, as late as the eighteenth century, history was regarded as a literary art\footnote{Easson (1991:1). This is evidenced in the titles of such texts, which presented themselves as “Histories” (see Abrams:1988)}. Interestingly, the 16th and early 17th Century dramas of Shakespeare, as examples of the writing of the period which merged entertainment or art with historical and near-contemporary themes and characters, and which can be alternatively read today as a commodification of Holinshed’s historical biographies\footnote{Hamilton (2007:64-65)} and events for the purposes of entertainment\footnote{Hunter (1996:14-15)}, were not seriously questioned at the time by his contemporaries for their historical merits. Partly this is because his historical dramas were highly complimentary
to the elites, particularly the ruling Tudors\(^1\), and partly because they were considered as “trifles”\(^2\) and “lower class entertainments”\(^3\).

It seems to be an exaggeration to assume that the audience or readership of these elementary forms of historical and biographical narratives were unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, or did not know that they were being entertained rather than educated; when the secular theatrical context was entirely removed from the religiously didactic passion/morality plays\(^4\). The assumption that these distinctions are purely modern, is an oversimplification. After all, Herodotus’ reputation as “the father of lies” was a label imposed by his own contemporaries and other ancient commentators\(^5\). Today, by contrast he is known as “the father of comparative anthropology”\(^6\). It is evident therefore, that a keen sense of the division between fact and fiction has always existed, however elementary it was, and however much the nature of scholarship has been refined. Indeed, there is some compelling evidence for cultural-informational literacy anciently: not only did the synchronic readership understand generic distinctions but they were resistant to exploitation and betrayal of trust. This is indicated by the ancient critics of Herodotus, including Plutarch\(^7\). In 18\(^{th}\) Century England this was shown by the public rejection of authorial and publisher attempts to market fiction as history:

In the first edition (1719) of *Robinson Crusoe*... the title page announced that the work had been written by Crusoe, and the editor’s preface asserted that the book was “a just History of fact” (a controversy occurred when) a number of the early readers read the narrative as a factual account\(^8\).

Readers were outraged that a type of fraud has been perpetrated upon them: their trust in the written account, taken at face value, had been betrayed\(^9\). Similar reactions are recorded for other novels which represented themselves as biographical and by the mid 18\(^{th}\) Century the practice had largely been discontinued\(^10\). The reaction has been explained as largely the result of social change, particularly the rise of a literate, leisured and book-buying middle class who were prepared to question the veracity of the accounts they were reading\(^11\). It is also feasible that, even in its developmental stages, the field of commercial literature needed realignment with social expectations- and not the other way around.

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2 This was the case until after Shakespeare’s death, when the publication of the Folio helped elevate his prestige: Encyclopaedia Britannica (1973), Volume 20: p323.
5 Herodotus (1983:10).
6 Herodotus (1983:10).
7 Jolly (2001: Plutarch, Biography).
8 Mayer (1997:1).
10 Mayer (1997:1).
In this we can see an interesting paradox. On the one hand it is evident that there was an imperative being imposed on a genre from without by social pressure and norms: effectively what we would understand as stress arising from an evolving generic codification. In this case, it was an act of readership rebellion against misleading forms of novel writing which were ostensibly biographical but which were in reality mostly or all fiction. On the other hand, such notions of distinction between fiction and fact as applied to the new novels, and upon which they were being assessed, can be seen as an imperative from within the nascent genre itself, which informed the readership reaction.

Typically this type of publishing/marketing error is explained as being a result of the vagueness of the historical writing of the time, when authors considered that it was perfectly acceptable to continue creatively expanding on historical and social themes, as others, including Shakespeare and Chaucer, had done for centuries. The understanding of historical accuracy was in its early stages: Fielding, Swift, Defoe and others saw nothing inconsistent in the employment of descriptions of factuality and real experience in titles and forewords for fictional narratives, especially satires:

The views that Fielding presumably included in his meaning of the word *history* (included) the search for truth...facts alone only confuse, they must be ordered so that the reader can reach a detached judgment...satire (is) a critical tool for exploring, discovering and judging. It is clearly a means to an end that is...in the eighteenth-century sense, historical.

Swift even invented a preface from “the Publisher to the Reader” and an item of invented correspondence from Gulliver to his cousin to enhance the satire’s credibility. This indicates, presumably, that there was little or no authorial consideration for accountability to facts at a time when historiography as we would recognise it today was in its elementary stages, and novelists, particularly satirists, believed themselves to be at liberty to “order facts” so as to present the version of contemporary or historical society that the author wished the reader to accept. Such writers obviously considered that satirical uses of narrative constituted a viable form of history, or perhaps that it offered added authenticity to an allegorical narrative. Creative license has been, and still is today, often at odds with the central aims of biography.

However, there is one central illogicality in this type of explanation. If, even in the 18th Century, readers were sceptical of this approach, challenging editors and authors to evidence whether the account was actually auto/biographical or not, it evidences that, far from being only a nascent genre, the pact of biographical trust was apparently well-established. Similarly, it is also illogical that authors and/or publishers would market these novels as biographical if

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there was no financial advantage in doing so. That is, not only were they well aware of the nature of biographical trust, they also sought to gain a competitive edge in a rapidly growing market, by capitalising on, or exploiting, that trust. The social satire, which can be considered as a type of parable, needs to employ the guise of history in order to obtain the necessary foundational credibility required to generate narrative engagement, especially as it also needs to guard against libellous or other adverse action, in case the depicted persons recognise themselves too easily\(^1\).

There seems then, to have always been a fundamental generic division between fiction and non-fiction, certainly as it applied for biographical texts. The novel demonstrably filled a ready niche socially, generically and politically\(^2\), just as the biography had already done\(^3\). As with traditional fictive, allegorical or parabolic tales, the novel asks of the reader merely that disbelief is suspended\(^4\) for the course of the narrative, but that contextually and ultimately it is understood as a work of fiction. It is located as a narrative experience in and of itself, and makes no wider connection with the experience-able and discoverable world, except on a metaphorical level\(^5\). This This includes the telescoping of events and the elision of “the ceaseless flow of thought, feeling and sensation”\(^6\). Indeed, it is the possibility of reality, in the novel’s location, that renders it believable, while at the same time there is security in knowing that the scenes, action and persons are imagined:

> It exists, to tell the truth, only in the much debated fourth dimension. In dimensional space it has no existence…the novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own time, place, circumstance\(^7\).

This comment adequately summarises the necessary distinction between fiction and non-fiction. It could be rephrased as a description of the essential truth of biography, such that ‘everything is true in the biography –to the author’s best efforts- both in and outside its own time, place, and circumstance’. Or, when the reader has finished the text, the person depicted who came alive on its pages, will continue to be real. Overall, then, the category of historical fiction offers no generic challenge to biography since there is a fundamental discursive gap between the two.

Perhaps this is why, outside the academy, there is little generic confusion. The framing of the text as articulated through the commercial book industry signifies to the reader what degree of fictionalising they can expect, and this codification seems unambiguous. Similarly, Shakespeare’s historical plays depicted actual historical persons, but they were carefully chosen from

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\(^1\) Van Rooy (1965:70).
\(^4\) McKeon (2000).
\(^7\) Beal (1956:104-106), italics my emphasis.
subjects who were no longer alive, dramatised to a high level, and most
characters, events and dialogues were overwhelmingly invented\(^1\). They are,
therefore, more properly classified as novelistic or historical fiction, within a
dramatic frame-realisation. By comparison, texts of biographical fiction, which
seek to recreate the individual in an authentic setting, or which are even
infused with autobiographical elements, can be considered as a peripheral
type of biography. In these cases, the narrative dominates the text, but its
force is still contingent upon the greater probability that what the reader is
experiencing is real, or at least imaginable. The label (loosely) ‘based on a
true story’, with its overt connotation of uncertainty presents a problem of
course, and this is where the distinction can be made. However, the pact of
trust is observed, such that the reader is alerted to the narrator’s role and the
uncertainty is contained to some degree at least

Indeed, the position of the narrator in these texts permits both a coherent
sequence of events and some distance from the persons depicted. Perhaps
the narratorial role should not be underestimated. It has been suggested that
the cultural narrator has enjoyed a prominent, authorial position historically\(^2\):

Narrators are typically trusted...In seeking and being granted rights to
a lengthy verbal contribution narrators assert their authority to tell, to
take up the role of knower, or entertainer, or producer, in relation to the
addressees’ adopted role of learner or consumer\(^3\).

This cultural positioning also relies on linguistic framing. Traditionally even
fairy tales were invested with register\(^4\) credibility as cautionary tales because
the standard collocation/opening sentence- *Once upon a time there lived*-located the story in a credible time and space. The locating of a tale and its
characters into some time frame, however vague, meant that the tale was
probable or at the very least, possible. It is thus cohesive for genre. Indeed,
the contemporary distinctions made for genre have codified narrative to such
a degree that the opening line traditionally operative for fairy tales would also
signify a warning that the narrative is false, for most readers today. This is an
example of generic shift, and variegated cultural-informational literacy.

Similarly, linguistic framing is evident in conventional historical-biographical
fiction. The dominance of narrative prose and “lack of footnotes” signals an
absence of documentation\(^5\). This fulfills the felicity conditions of fiction, which
in turn signifies that the felicity conditions and maxims for truth are being
violated or flouted. Best-selling authors including Colleen McCullough and
Nigel Tranter employ this procedure\(^6\). These authors largely invent their
narratives despite an impressive historiography involving meticulous research.
Indeed, their historiography has been recognised. McCullough has published

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\(^2\) Toolan (1988); Booth (1996); Bal (1997).

\(^3\) Toolan (1988:47).

\(^4\) Crystal (1995).


\(^6\) Examples include Tranter’s *The Bruce Trilogy* (Coronet;1996), and McCullough’s *Masters of Rome* series (Century;1990,1995).
a biography on Sir Roden Cutler in 1998, and has been awarded a Doctor of Letters by Macquarie University (1995) for her historiography. Tranter, who uses footnotes, was similarly awarded honorary degrees from various Scottish universities. Interestingly, there is often a didactic element in this type of writing, with the author seeking both to entertain and to revise mythical versions, even while referring to their work as primarily a work of fiction:

To write any historical novel about actual personages...with any integrity, demands much research, considerable deduction, assumption and sheer invention...especially when much has to be unlearned on account of Shakespeare's...brilliant drama (which is also a) travesty of history...few royal couples have been so grievously traduced.

Within the category of historical-biographical fiction is the genre of autobiographical fiction, which is an invented narrative depicting characters and events that are allegorical of the author's own life experience, and which can overlap the distinctions of true biography. Examples include David Copperfield or Great Expectations by Charles Dickens, Sons and Lovers by D. H. Lawrence or Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad. In these books, the nucleus of the narrative is autobiographical, but it is rendered in a plausible imagined setting and with characters and events that expand the story in the third person. The purpose, in addition to social commentary, is to explore introspectively but without the constraints of strict biographical narrative. There is also the extended creative, descriptive language, without necessary documentation or the so-called "purple prose". Certainly the reader might be able to recognise elements of the author's life, but there is no ambiguity: there is a very clear distinction whereby the reader understands that while the tale may indeed be allegorical, the story itself is entirely fictional. This remove satisfies both the felicity conditions of biography to some extent while warning the reader that the maxim of quality is flouted: the reader therefore controls the extent to which the text can be read as biography. The author and reader reader "licence themselves, in realistic works, to depict alarmingly real, yet imaginary lives".

Testing the limits of genre theory
Instance 2: Mark Chopper Read and criminal biography

Of course, there is biographical writing which tests the boundaries of this pact of trust, the tolerance of creative fictionalizing, in a more deliberate and pragmatic way. This type of biography is unusual, since to succeed, it must satisfy the requirements of factuality and yet still offer sufficient scandalous detail to intrigue, shock and engage a readership that is often jaded by life.
writing’s rich variety of experience and subjects. If the author adds the enigmatic note that this account may or may not contain certain embellishments, it can act as a hermeneutic trigger so that the reader willingly undertakes a challenge to act as sleuth in discerning what is fact and what is fiction. The difference between this type of biographical writing and historical/biographical fiction, is that the authors transparently pre-warn the reader that they are criminals (reformed or otherwise), usually habitual liars, and in general, untrustworthy.

The highly successful series of episodic autobiographies by Mark ‘Chopper’ Read was marketed as precisely this type of biography. Appealing to an Australian readership initially, but with some success overseas, Read’s innovative autobiographical style may be peculiarly Australian in many ways. It also owes much of its success to the British tradition of the criminal biography. This is a sub-genre in its own right with more than three centuries of tradition, and it features an overt moral imperative underlined and often subverted by voyeuristic details designed to shock and entertain: “In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England few forms of literature could rival the popularity of criminal biography.” Indeed, Read’s self-characterisation certainly fulfils the requirements for criminal biography, especially the dual nature or ambiguity of a criminal confessing to a life of crime. We wonder whether the ‘confessor’ is warning us against following his erroneous life-choices, or simply self-aggrandising:

Ostensibly such books were meant to teach moral lessons by illustrating the slippery slope by which failure to attend church or any type of vice would invariably lead to a life of crime. They also purported to warn readers about the tricks criminals used to rob and defraud them…But the entertaining tone and titillating detail of some of these books betrayed the fact that these were more often a form of entertainment than of moral instruction. The more notorious criminals attracted more than one biography, and some of the biographies went through multiple editions.

Overt didacticism seems to be evident in Read’s writing when, after confessing that he enjoys the celebrity status and making money, he declares that his main impulse is to convince others that crime is not a good career move:

I don’t condone what I have done, but it is in the past and I can’t do anything to change it now. However, I can use my experience to inform every single person…you have the opportunity to change direction…

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1 Barthes (1990b:19).
2 There are 10 books in this series, all best-sellers: chopperread.com (2007).
3 In my opinion, the colonial convict experience in Australia may have something to do with Read’s success, but more likely it has resulted from media coverage of his ‘exploits’ in the same manner as any tabloid-isation of celebrity.
you can redirect your life and make something of it. I am speaking from experience. It takes a big man to stand up for himself in any circumstance, but it takes even a bigger man to look at himself in the mirror and say I don't like what I am doing with my life and I'm gonna change it, then follow it through¹.

There is no doubt that Read qualifies, under any classification, for number of convictions or his own confessed crimes, including murder, as one of Australia’s most notorious career criminals. So the public interest and curiosity cultivated by years of media attention was already receptive to any account he would give of himself. His raconteur’s gift supplies the balance of his marketability and self-commoditization.

Additionally there is one very important ingredient, which perhaps characterizes Read’s style more than that of comparable criminal biographies: he actually warns us that we cannot trust what he is telling us. Indeed, the very appeal of Read’s books is in the author’s explicit and idiosyncratic mix of fact and fiction. Unlike other writers who claim complete or near-complete veracity, Read tells us from the first page that he likes to “tell a yarn”, and that he is “liberal with the facts”². The promise of reading such an account has appeal, because we know that, despite the notoriety of his criminal history, the author from the outset tells the reader that he is a liar. In fact, he tells us that he doesn’t even care if we believe him or not³. This frankness with the reader utilizes a reverse logic through dramatic irony, and imbues the author with a credibility he would not otherwise have had. We know that amid all the bravado and fiction we will have a real insight and be taken on a journey into the criminal underworld by a genuine member of that class. In other words, we understand that when Read offers us an uncensored and unqualified account, it ironically presents us with an accurate picture of him, his world and some real events—however amplified⁴.

A Chopper book is accordingly read and treated as an accurate autobiography because it is indeed an insight into the mind of the author: lies and all. The principal secret to Read’s success was his astute capitalising on the media reports of his criminal career, turning his infamy into a mix of true stories with salacious detail and creative elaboration, so that the reader is never entirely certain which parts are made up and which are not. It could also be argued that Read employs a hermeneutic device, which triggers the reader’s curiosity through the enigmatic mix of truth and fiction—although this is more likely to be intuitive on his part rather than a particularly deliberated behaviour:

As an autobiography, trust is required from the reader, as there is little room for interpretation...there is no ambiguity between truth and fiction. Some aspects of Chopper still remain inexplicable after the final chapters...but perhaps not every aspect of Read should be

¹ Read (2003).
² Read (2001:cover).
³ Read (2001:1-3).
transparent. This is something the earless bandit has clearly kept in mind… *Chopper* is recollection, torture manual, crime exposé and perhaps even a decent parenting tool to keep kids on the straight and narrow. Unapologetic and forceful, *Chopper* is a compelling no-frills autobiography that fulfills its blurb and “tells it as it is,” cementing Read's place as Australia’s most inexplicable cultural icon.

Indeed, the irreverent economy with truth and subjectivity, mixed with humour, largely account for Read’s popular success. This method of taking the reader into his confidence generates the tantalizing belief that we will gain an insight into this most taboo of worlds, the criminal underworld. So successful was his strategy that Read seems to have almost become a mainstream author. The appeal of such accounts cannot be underestimated. Readers are more than able to distinguish when the author is presenting a flawed argument, but may be willing to accept such an account because they are interested in hearing that person’s version of events. Perhaps this is a sign of a readership more conversant with the genre and therefore increasingly culturally literate, willing and able to distinguish for subjectivity and independent factuality. Biographies are therefore sought after when they conform to cultural norms and generic expectations, but which also offer an uninterrupted view of the subject, complete with the complexities and enigmas of a contradictory personality. That is, the historiography must be trustworthy, but biographies are also read for their flaws and subjectivities: “[there are] personal biases which cannot and should not be expunged by a methodology which is faultless”.

Of course the Read type of biographical writing is unusual for the genre, in that it manages to fulfill the pact of trust with the reader both because of and despite the author's confessed/boasted mendacity. It fulfills the generic requirements of truth conditions because the writer clearly and transparently alerts the reader to the fact that he will flout the maxim of quality. He also tends to write in a concise, blunt style which in its minimalism adheres to the biographical need of documentation over narrative creativity.

**Testing the limits of genre theory**

**Instance 3: fraud as deliberate but undisclosed manipulation**

There are few non-fiction texts which can win acceptance using such an unconventional logic. In fact usually writers attempting to twist or manipulate the popular expectations of biography’s norms will fail spectacularly, and this is because they are not honest about their intentions. It is obvious that readers will not accept certain contraventions of the biographical pact. Perhaps this is because deliberate attempts to circumvent the generic boundaries of biography are the simplest infractions to identify, both in their

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1 Cho (2003).
2 The ‘commercial rehabilitation’ (my term) or ‘mainstreaming’ of Read must be complete when he can appear on commercial television, *ABC Radio* and *ABC TV*, advertisements and print media: *abc.net.au* (2007).
motivations, which are usually monetary or for public acclaim, and in their audacity. Certainly there are comprehensive resources employed by commercial publishers to prevent deception, including teams of lawyers in the larger publishing houses\(^1\). By contrast, generic infractions by amateur life writing don’t seem to obtain publicity, presumably since the monetary, emotional and reputational stakes are much lower. As evidence of the emotional force generated by the feeling of betrayed trust, terms such as hoax, fraud and deception are used by commentators to describe the reaction when an author of life writing has been exposed for deliberately and covertly manipulating the life narrative. These are not minor infractions, but typically large-scale abuses of trust: sometimes even the biographical subject is invented. It is evident, therefore that there is more at stake for the genre of life writing than mere conventionality, and that generic tampering at this level is not tolerated.

Fraud is used in this sense both for its denotations of “money obtained by deception”, and also as “a breach of confidence by which it is sought to gain some unfair or dishonest advantage”\(^2\). I am using it contextually to signify deliberate but undisclosed manipulation of generic trust, synonymically with deception, betrayal and tampering.

In recent decades there have been several celebrated cases of auto/biographical fraud in the Australian context. Some of these have emanated from overseas, others can be described as local in origin. The severity of these cases can be differentiated from other disputed accounts which have been contested through the media and other public channels, and often without any resolution, because the publisher concerned has withdrawn the offending book from sale after it has become obvious that a breach of biographical trust has occurred.

The so-called *Hitler Diaries* incident from April 1983 is a celebrated case of fraud which attempted to capitalise on the trust implicit in the genre for monetary gain. Forged diaries purporting to have been written by Hitler himself were presented amid world-wide publicity, and were sold for $5 million to a German magazine; with serialisation rights sold to a British newspaper for another $400,000\(^3\). Several Australian newspapers accepted the story’s veracity from the British press as well, and the first excerpts were published internationally\(^4\). Ultimately the documents were discredited and the perpetrators gaoled for fraud. The international media was forced into an apology and retraction, while the academic duped into believing the story, who had staked his reputation on the authenticity of the documents, “died in January 2003, his reputation badly tarnished and inextricably linked to the forged Hitler Diaries”\(^5\).

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1 Wallace (2004).
3 *BBC news.co.uk* (nd).
4 *BBC news.co.uk* (nd).
5 *BBC news.co.uk* (nd).
Another international fraud, referred to at the time as a “literary hoax” \(^1\) which had a profound influence in Australia was the publication of Norma Khouri’s *Forbidden Love* (2003), a supposed memoir which became the vehicle for all manner of political, religious and gender agendas:

Her tragic story stole readers’ hearts and triggered an international outcry. She became a best-selling author...She petitioned the United Nations personally, was published in 15 countries... She toured the world reducing listeners to tears and anger, in interviews, bookshops and at other events (and) became a standard-bearer for oppressed Arab women\(^2\).

The biographical pact was broken in this case, not because it wasn’t written by the author, but because the subject’s life was fabricated almost completely: what she claimed as her life did not happen\(^3\). So profound was the investment, materially\(^4\) and ideologically\(^5\), in Khouri’s book that the discovery of the fraud in turn became the inspiration for a major documentary film which won awards internationally for its exposure of the biographical deception\(^6\). When the author claimed ‘literary licence’ as a defence, as well as moral integrity for not receiving adequate monetary compensation, it heightened the debate which ultimately led to her publisher suing for breach of contract. An *ABC-TV* article visited the issues of biographical trust which lie at the centre of the furore:

NORMA KHOURI: When I wrote the memoir, I chose to write only about my time in Jordan, and I have literary licence to do so. And that’s what it is.

PETRIA WALLACE: Not so, says Larry Finlay, the Managing Director of Transworld, her publisher in the UK.

LARRY FINLAY: If there are serious factual inaccuracies – which she’s admitted to – then how do we know what to believe? You know, if the book is non-fiction, everything within it has to be true, and she can’t pick and choose which bits are true and which bits are not.

NORMA KHOURI: I haven’t received any royalties from sales of the books anyway...I wanted all the royalties from sales to go to the United Nations Human Rights Fund or human rights organisations.

LARRY FINLAY: She has received a very substantial advance against royalties owned, split into four tranches – one paid on signature of the

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\(^1\) Although published internationally, Khouri wrote much of the book in Australia after obtaining a protection visa: Wallace (2004).


\(^3\) Knox (2004).

\(^4\) Sales in Australia alone exceeded 200,000: Wallace (2004).

\(^5\) The controversy over the uses of the memoir led to much recrimination in the literary scene: Wallace (2004).

\(^6\) Broinowski (2007).
contract, one on delivery of the book and then two further tranches on
publication in paperback in the UK and then in its final mass market
publication in February of 2003.

PETRIA WALLACE: Transworld UK intends to sue Norma Khouri for
breach of contract¹.

The scale of the fraud was put into perspective by the publisher both for its
extensive monetary value and also for its immense infraction of the intangible
notion of generic trust. The defence of creative licence was rejected because
the right of the reader to a correctly labelled biographical product outweighed
authorial tampering with the intrinsic trust of the genre. This indicates quite
conclusively that deliberate misrepresentation in life writing is a type of
generic fraud:

Khouris hoax will take its place in a long Australian tradition of literary
fraud, from Ern Malley² to Helen Darville-Demidenko. But no other
fraudulent book has had such wide sales or impact, and in Darville’s
case, the deception involved only the author’s persona, not her book.
Khouris has misled the world both on the page and in person³.

The mention of Darville’s deceptive conduct, which Knox labels as fraud is
interesting since it raises the issue of identity, with the author in this case
perpetrating a particularly multicultural type of biographical fabrication. Helen
Darville wrote The Hand that signed the Paper⁴ which was originally marketed
marketed in the genre of historical fiction, with the author represented as an
historian⁵, but the subsequent publicity indicated that she was surnamed
Demidenko, had Ukrainian lineage, and had written an account loosely based
on her family’s World War II experiences⁶. Exposed as a fraud, the author
admitted plagiarism and misappropriation of memory and ethnic identity.
When she was required to hand back the prestigious Miles Franklin award,
the incident embarrassed many critics who had endorsed the book⁷. Some
continued to defend her authorship on the basis of its literary merits alone, as
a viable “reading of history”⁸ but there was general consensus that she had
lost all credibility either as an historian or literary artist⁹. Andrew Reimer even
even went so far as to conclude that the public had lost “faith in the authorial
voice” as a result of incidents such as this¹⁰. In support of this Cambridge
University put together in 2002 a “25 page list of notable literary frauds” which

¹ Wallace (2004): bold my emphasis.
² The Ern Malley scandal is poetic, rather than biographical, and the perpetrators’ motivation
was apparently as a literary critical hoax under an assumed name. Therefore it is not included
in this discussion.
⁴ Publisher: Allen & Unwin (1994).
⁶ The Sydney Morning Herald (21-8-1995); The Age (25-8-1995).
⁷ The Sydney Morning Herald (21-8-1995); The Age (25-8-1995).
⁸ Bennie (2006:3-32; 418-419).
includes many “biographical frauds”\(^1\). It indicates that there has been and continues to be external pressure on generic limits, but it also demonstrates that there are defined and strict limits when it comes to the integrity of authorship, especially the authorship of real lives. Indeed, this type of comment should reflect more on increased cultural literacy, since, in the light of biography’s increasing popularity, it would be more accurate to say that the public is actually endorsing biography which is demonstrably authentic. They clearly identify fraud as the exception rather than the rule.

It can be considered a sure and distinct type of literary fraud when an author deliberately assumes another identity, impersonating another real person in order to benefit financially or socially, from this type of imposture, in the production and commercialisation of life writing. The boundaries of creative license do not extend to the betrayal of generic biographical trust by an author, since the premise of non-fiction also entails certain constraints which do not admit fabrication of the essential data. Additionally media, critical and public outrage seemed to centre as much on Darville’s biographical fraud as on the fraudulent authorial persona as a misappropriation of ethnic identity: perhaps a form of ‘cultural-authorial imperialism’\(^2\). Somehow the allegations of plagiarism (another type of authorial fraud) seemed to get lost amid the debate over her fraud of identity.

Similar reactions occurred when Leon Carmen, alias Wanda Koolmatrie, produced *My Own Sweet Time*\(^3\). Carmen, a 47-year-old white male, confessed to the invention of the authorial persona of an Aboriginal woman who was not only a “descendant of the Pitjantjatara (but also) one of the stolen generation”\(^4\). After initially seeking security in the idea of creative license, the author ultimately failed to impress his critics when he and his literary agent declared that the whole incident had been an hilarious hoax\(^5\). To many critics, it was unimportant as to whether it was contrived or not. It certainly was not considered ‘funny’ by Aboriginal Australians, particularly the Aboriginal publishing company, which had invested and lost money in his fraud: “Roberta Sykes, Ruby Langford, and other writers have called on Carmen to hand back the money”\(^6\). The offence lay in the fact that the contravention of biographical trust had been exacerbated by gender, racial and cultural theft for the purposes of financial/career advancement, and it was clearly regarded as a case of fraud:

The Wanda Koolmatrie / Leon Carmen affair not only crossed gender and genre (published and promoted as female autobiography but was male-fiction) but also crossed culture: white-Anglo Saxon to instant Aborigine. It is possibly the genre in which the book appeared that is

\(^{1}\) Ruthven (2002).
\(^{2}\) My term for the cultural inequity implicit in multiculturalism when an Anglo person steals cultural property from an ethnic minority. The implication is that a person from an ethnic minority will not suffer the same censure when assuming the identity of an Anglo person (see Heiss:1999).
\(^{4}\) Heiss (1999).
\(^{5}\) Bayley (2004:1-12).
\(^{6}\) Wimmer (1998).
the major point of contention. The author portrayed the work as autobiographical, writing in the area of Aboriginal women's life writing and so the work is therefore immediately a fake and fraudulent (it is) the greatest and most recent theft of Aboriginal identity¹.

The incident can be compared to the controversy caused by Elizabeth Durack in 1997 when after years of selling paintings under the assumed Aboriginal identity of Eddie Burrup, she expressed “naive bewilderment about the ensuing controversy” when the fraud was exposed². Yet she was fully aware that the biographical details she had used to sell the paintings in urban galleries around Australia had been entirely invented and elaborated on over the years³. When directly questioned over her “borrowing” of another cultural identity she thought it a “cloudy area”⁴. For the Aboriginal people involved at the time in organizing legal protection for indigenous artists, there was no such confusion⁵.

Although there have been strict controls in place to authenticate authorship which is reflective of external social acceptance of genre, there is a sizable portion of academia which seems to be pushing for an extreme Foucauldian position:

> Australia’s literary community is once again split down the middle…Some opined that the background was irrelevant: only the art itself should be judged. (Doesn’t it remind you of the “death-of-the author” argument in the Darville scam?)…Aboriginality is a construct anyway⁶.

The claim of artistic licence clearly does not extend to the manipulation of data and details, especially when those details have the capacity to embarrass or otherwise create hurt. There is also the advancement of career at another’s expense, which is also financial gain. Ironically, or perhaps hypocritically, the academics supporting the notion of constructedness for this type of creativity and artistic autonomy, seek status and credibility by publishing their views in journals and other publications which are peer reviewed and subject to the most stringent of scholarship regulations for authentic authorship and qualifications. Perhaps a meaningful analogy could be drawn between this type of biographical theft, and the criminal activity of identity theft/fraud, where the social resources of a person are assumed or stolen by another for financial advantage⁷. It is certainly difficult to see how authorial misappropriation of another life for financial gain benefits anyone except the perpetrator. It is also predictable that persons advocating biographical fraud would not endure misrepresentation of themselves. Either way, a fundamental social trust has been abrogated in that there is no

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¹ Heiss (1999).
² Ion (2004).
³ Durack (1997).
⁴ Durack (1997).
⁵ Ion (2004).
⁶ Wimmer (2002).
⁷ Nurani (2007).
warning that the maxim of quality has been flouted: this constitutes a calculated deception.

Indeed, if the biographical code exists to protect representation of self, it seems to entail even the linearity of a life. For instance, when speaking about Michael Moore’s representations of lives in documentaries, the film critic Jack Matthews asserted that when a narrative manipulates a life’s chronology it has significant potential for distortion:

There’s a covenant between a filmmaker who calls himself a non-fiction documentary filmmaker and the audience, that what you're putting on the screen and what you're saying is a fact - and that includes the time sequences and everything else…he didn't do that ... he broke that covenant several times¹.

Testing the limits of genre theory
Instance 4: artistic licence and libel, or “the aesthetic alibi”

If trust is at the heart of interpersonal relations in DA theory, it is easy to see then, why fictionalising over data to create hurt or social disadvantage to the subject/s of life writing is one avenue where legal protection exists in the entitlements over libel². The legal definition of libel as “defamation in print” demonstrates the often hazy area of biographical factuality:

.Libel is) matter which tends to lower the plaintiff in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally…calculated to injure the reputation of another by exposing him to hatred, contempt or ridicule³.

Interestingly, in cases of libel, authorial intention is not considered to be as important as the effect on the reader, of the actual words on the page⁴. Thus, it is a concept which independently validates the generic norms established in the development of life writing: it is the speech act itself, in context, rather than the convention which takes priority. What might be considered libellous in one context will be considered “legal gossip” or “legitimate social criticism” in another⁵.

The application of defamation considerations to biography is however in practice often indistinct and unpredictable, and might be determined simply by the recourse to highly paid legal teams⁶. There is, of course the problem of a judicial system where the “libel-defendant is considered guilty until proven innocent”⁷. There is also the simple methodological need to negotiate

¹ Urban (2009).
sensitivities of all persons interested in the finished product, independently of legal concerns. For many biographers, therefore, the search for factuality is a delicate balancing act between the facts at their disposal and their willingness or ability to actually include them: “a key element of the biographer’s art is knowing what to leave out”\(^1\). Typically the publisher will also take great care to avoid legal proceedings\(^2\).

Nevertheless, there does seem to be a consensus generally for what constitutes that which could be termed ‘fair game’ or “qualified privilege”\(^3\). That is, defensible truth or perhaps tactful or oblique references to sensitive material are within the legal parameters of publishable material\(^4\). It also seems to be an area that becomes clearest when these invisible ethical lines are crossed:

Gossip is a matter of ethics…good gossip is accurate…one definition of great biography is gossip we can trust. But biography, contemporary history and gossip are all doing the same thing: trading in privacy\(^5\).

The idea of privacy as the right of the biographical subject seems odd when the life of a person is being scanned for interest and public appeal. However, there does seem to be a boundary in every life beyond which the biographer should not go, even when the subject is dead. It is not easy to define, despite Epstein’s rather overconfident claim that he could: “disrupt, deform, and de-authorise the rule-governed relationships by and through which the ‘law’ of biography is and has been understood”\(^6\). There is no specific “law of biography”, although it is more than adequately covered by “copyright law and enlivened by privacy law (which) appear to foreclose the opportunity to use the unpublished expression written by biographical subjects without express permission”\(^7\). It is also more than adequately covered by defamation acts\(^8\). There is another way of viewing the principles involved in the depiction of a person, which shows the biographer’s conflict of interest:

The ethics of writing and publishing a (biography) are controversial…Death may end the danger of a libel suit, but it does not reduce the hurt which revelation can inflict on the living…a (biography) requires the very things likely to most upset the living: ruthless honesty and vividness of recall\(^9\).

One way of defining this biographical limit is to place the subject at the centre of the discussion and to ask what degree of control that person should have, or in reality does have, over the telling of their own life. This then is balanced

\(^1\) France (1998).
\(^2\) Wimmer (2002); Marr (11-11-1998:6).
\(^3\) Defamation Act NSW (2005). Similar wording is in all Australian legalisation, which is based on the UK system, as noted below.
\(^5\) Marr (1997:36).
\(^6\) Epstein (1987:3).
\(^7\) Bilder (1991:300).
against the biographer’s professional autonomy\(^1\). The simplest but perhaps most accurate answer, is that each biography is a negotiated text responding to its own unique context: “it will be a struggle between sensitivity…and what the real world will tolerate”\(^2\). If, however, the biographer fails in their duty to the reader for the pact of trust by deliberately writing about the subject with malicious intent, it is liable to both public and legal rejection. This intentionality is specifically noted in legislation: “the defence is defeated if it is proven that the publication was actuated by malice not merely because it was published for reward”\(^3\).

Therefore there appears to be a synchronicity between popular and legal conceptions of what is not permissible in biography. When this malice is combined with salacious and speculative detail, the central plank of the aesthetic defence becomes untenable. A clear and celebrated case in recent Australian publishing history was Bob Ellis’s book on contemporary political figures which was pulped after being deemed libellous: principally because the author had indulged in speculation about the private lives of his targets: “all I did was repeat was repeat a yarn I’d heard…Tanya Costello was a particular type of woman who fucks men”\(^4\). Ellis’ 1997 book: *Goodbye Jerusalem: Night Thoughts of a Labor Outsider* (Random House) was deemed libellous in the ACT Supreme Court, and costs/damages awarded against the publisher. All copies were ordered recalled and pulped\(^5\).

Apart from the duty of an author to the genre and to the presumed reader for factuality where biographical details of real persons are concerned, this incident also countered the general assumption that when a reputable publisher produces a book for sale, its editorial and legal team have sufficiently checked the veracity, or liability of the author’s work\(^6\). It is to be hoped that publishers have more than just legalistic concerns in mind when considering any life writing manuscript as a potential venture; nevertheless the threat of libel action seems to be a necessary check against negligence when the stakes are so high.

Additionally, the claim of artistic licence as some inalienable right appears to be a false refuge for authors such as Bob Ellis who react badly when their own integrity is questioned. A case of double standards was exposed in this instance, when Bob Ellis claimed the right to author the “shady pasts” of political figures, only to react with outrage when the media investigated a paternity case that proved, against his denials, that he had had an extra-marital affair\(^7\). Described as “the self-professed champion of free speech”, Ellis subsequently had another book pulped even before it reached the launch stage when the publisher received legal advice that it would incur libel

\(^1\) Evans (2002).
\(^2\) Hamilton (2008:324).
\(^3\) Defamation Act NSW (2005).
\(^4\) Marr (11-11-1998:6).
\(^5\) Marr (11-11-1998:6-7).
\(^6\) Marr (11-11-1998:6).
\(^7\) The Sydney Morning Herald (17-9-1999:p3).
proceedings\(^1\). Whether this represents overly protective laws of libel, or malicious intent on Ellis’s part, is not the central issue. What is critical, is that authors such as Ellis do not appear to understand that methodological integrity—or historiography or factuality—is an indispensable feature of biography, whatever raconteur ability they might have. In this they are at variance with both the genre and their readership (perhaps the “right-thinking persons” referred to previously\(^2\)) for whom there is no confusion generically. There is a clear agreement that negative material which cannot be substantiated is inadmissible, as it can do irreparable damage:

The defence which has been termed ‘the aesthetic alibi’...is deployed to make otherwise objectionable conduct acceptable...in the classic language of defamation law the mud would stick, and the suspicion lurk\(^3\).

Indeed, it can also be said that since such incidents provoke such a reaction, it indicates that they are the exception rather than the rule, and that the power to shock or scandalize is still very much in evidence contemporarily in biography. This in turn is persuasive evidence that the social understanding or consensus for life writing as a genre is stable.

**Testing the limits of genre theory**

**Instance 5: deliberate omissions of significant information**

In addition to the fabrication of biographical details, there is also the betrayal of trust which results from the withholding of crucial information. Sometimes this amounts to a refusal to discuss details which are already in the public domain, and which the reader buys the book to have further explained. At other times this type of deception only becomes apparent when other persons subsequently challenge the published account. Regardless of the way in which trust is betrayed, or discovered, the public is sensitive to generic fraud of this type. When authors undertake to produce a biography, they are also promising the readership that they will obtain information which is private. After all, no life is ever entirely a matter of public scrutiny, and there is always the expectation that the reader will learn more about the subject through reading a biography\(^4\). This was certainly the case with Andrew Morton’s biography of Princess Diana, which became hugely successful, regardless of how much the public already knew about the subject\(^5\). This new information could be the subject’s motivations for public actions, or private conversations, diaries or letters, or simply the relationships, or dimensions of those relationships, which are not public. In some cases, of course, this is pure voyeuristic curiosity on the part of the readership. Naturally, if this promise is not delivered, the disappointment is traceable to the failure to deliver on the

\(^1\) *The Age* (28-4-2001:p1).
\(^3\) Rimmer (2004:38,42).
\(^4\) Freadman (2002).
maxim of quality, and the biographer is viewed as reneging on that undertaking.

In a recent Australian example, Don Watson managed to avoid including core issues relating to his subject when writing of Paul Keating’s years in office. His book *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart* (Knopf/Random House:2002) went to six print runs, with sales of over 50,000, which saw it in the best-seller list for 15 weeks. Despite years of prolonged media coverage of Keating’s financial dealings and an electoral backlash against his secret negotiations with Indonesia’s President Suharto for the Security Agreement of 1995, there is little discussion of these crucial elements in a book which was otherwise an outstanding commercial success. Particularly obvious by its omission is discussion of the training of Kopassus/Indonesian Special Forces by the Australian military. This training was directly instrumental in the massacres of civilians by Indonesian forces in East Timor and Aceh, and was a direct, if unintended product of Keating’s privately engineered security arrangements with Suharto. In a book of almost 800 pages, there were only 15 pages containing any references to these topics, and these were very brief, dismissive discussions. By contrast, during Keating’s years in office there were 113 newspaper reports which dealt in depth, prominently, and directly with issues absent from Watson’s book. Examples of these items were: Keating’s multi-million dollar profit from a piggery business that was technically insolvent; tax avoidance from this profit that was never investigated while Keating was in office; and the sale of the business to W. Soeryadjaya, a business partner to the Suharto family.

Even with the benefit of six years of hindsight, Watson scarcely mentions any of these issues in his book. His summation of Keating was unashamedly sycophantic, when speaking at the National Press Club to launch his book:

Keating was a man full of paradoxes, but his achievements were unparalleled in the post-war period…a man of very cool judgement, gentle disposition and clear-eyed analysis. More often than not he was the still point in a chaotic world.

On the other hand, the then East Timorese leadership was less complimentary:

Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta accused Keating of appeasing a brutal dictatorship…In a bitter attack on Mr Keating, whom he referred to as ‘that former prime minister’, Mr Ramos Horta said Labor had allowed Indonesia to think it could get away with genocide.

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2 *AC Nielsen* (6-7-2002).
3 John Pilger, writing in the *Sunday Age* (22-11-1998:p3).
4 Examples are in Watson (2002:503,635-636).
5 *The Age* (22-3-1999:p1); *The Australian* (23-3-1999:p2).
7 *The Age* (22-3-1999:p1).
9 *The Australian* (3-4-2000:p6).
There is no discussion in Watson’s book of the financial links to the Indonesians, a fact which surely must have influenced Keating’s foreign policy decisions. Keating’s domestic pecuniary interests were also subject to accusations of illegality. Three years before Watson’s book was published, the Attorney-General conducted a four month investigation into “serious allegations of criminal conduct, impropriety and misleading Parliament” by the former Prime Minister, before deciding that “only a Royal Commission could establish whether Mr Keating used his public office for private benefit, but there was no point holding one because so much time had elapsed and (he) was no longer in office”.

By failing to include criticism such as this, or indeed even to address these issues in any serious manner, Watson presents an account that is demonstrably flawed as an historical and biographical document. He had a career in journalism, and was an academic and historian prior to his role as Keating’s speechwriter from 1992-6. Such a background fosters an expectation that the author will raise contentious political issues, discuss objections, and then deal with them by presenting an insider’s viewpoint. Of course part of the historian’s challenge in this case is dealing with the author’s political alignment and working relationship with the subject. This is standard historiography or critical method. Instead, we see the partisan observer within Keating’s government composing a personal narrative, rather than an objective analytical account. The overt subjectivity of the title, where the “Recollections of a Bleeding Heart” refers to Watson’s ironic self-label as the author and insider, does not diminish the reader’s expectation of a thoroughly balanced account of the subject. There is a critical dilemma here then. The book was popularly successful, but it also failed in several areas of the biographical pact. Certainly this insight into a controversial politician, combined with the undoubted narrative ability of Watson, is at the heart of the book’s success:

[It] was a fine example of how one politician’s story can lure readers...Keating is quite [controversial], absolutely the prime candidate for a political biography...Keating himself was one reason for the book’s success; Don Watson’s fine writing was another.

In other words, to some degree Watson’s book sold well despite a lack of critical method, because the subject was inherently intriguing, and the narrative style warranted a sympathetic readership. Perhaps it sold well because of, rather than despite, a lack of critical methodology in significant areas. Certainly Watson’s style of writing is engaging, but there remains the

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2 Hobart Mercury (13-8-1999:p1).
4 Evans (2002).
7 Richard Freadman quoted in *Sunday Age* (14-7-2002:p13).
suspicion that the book was read by people who sought a personal insight into Keating’s life, including the origins and causes of his marriage breakdown, rather than an impartial evaluation of his politics. Although presented as a taboo subject on which his subject refused to offer any assistance, Watson does offer some intimate details, such as Keating’s frustration over his marriage breakdown: “the stress as…his perfect marriage had begun to fray”\(^1\).

There is also the industry view that political biographies typically pander to an ideological orientation and that more books are published for the ‘left’: “Mark Rubbo, co-owner of Readings book stores…said ‘with political stuff, my gut feeling is that the book buyers tend to be on the left side of politics’”\(^2\). This indicates that, as far as the readership was concerned, the author delivered on the biographical pact: providing a narrative that fulfilled the maxim of quality for those uninterested in, or ignorant of, the missing data.

If, as seems to be the understanding, readers of political biographies in Australia are more likely to be on the left side of politics, it would be interesting to compare a sample of life writing which is seen to be a betrayal of Labor, and which was overtly written as an attack on that side of politics. Watson’s account of Keating contrasts dramatically with a book that appeared two months later: Cheryl Kernot’s Speaking For Myself Again (Harper Collins:2002). Unlike Watson’s book, which immediately found a publisher, several publishers rejected the rights to Kernot’s autobiography before it was finally accepted\(^3\). As with Watson’s book, Kernot’s was heavily advertised and launched nationally, but sales were sluggish.

Then journalist Laurie Oakes revealed on Channel 9 and in his column in the Bulletin that in her book Kernot had not disclosed an affair with Labor senator Gareth Evans from 1993-8. Calling it “the biggest secret of her life”, Oakes said it was a “calculated deception…a not very honest book”\(^4\). He justified the revelation on the basis that Kernot had sought to take the high moral ground in writing a book that was intended to expose the Labor Party’s flaws as “a 100-year-old blokey institution extraordinarily resistant to internal reform”\(^5\), yet she failed to mention an affair with the man credited with triggering her defection from the Democrats to the Labor Party. The media and the public were very critical of Kernot’s ‘strategic amnesia’\(^6\), and sales stopped altogether: “industry observers agree it was one of the year’s great book-publishing debacles…overnight (Kernot’s) credibility was shot”\(^7\). Or: “The publicity highlighted what the book didn’t say in a way that made the public lose faith in the book…Kernot has been shown not to be true to that implicit autobiographical undertaking”\(^8\).

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1 Watson (2002:672).
2 Sunday Age (14-7-2002:p13).
3 Random House and Penguin (and possibly others) declined the publishing rights. Source: Sunday Age (14-7-2002:p13).
4 Courier Mail (11-7-2002:p17).
5 The Australian (26-7-2002:p11).
6 My term for her considered decision to omit the affair.
7 Sunday Age (8-9-2002:p7).
8 Sunday Age (14-7-2002:p13).
The question remains, then, that if both Watson’s and Kernot’s books had deliberate omissions, why did Watson’s become a success, and Kernot’s a failure? There are several reasons, but the most obvious is that Kernot’s book failed to deliver the “full and frank account” that it promised. What was widely seen as the most significant event in her political career, a secret affair, had been left out and the natural conclusion in the mind of the consumer was that the book was fraudulent. In an autobiographical account, this was unpardonable:

No autobiography (said Professor Freadman) told the whole truth. But there is an understanding that underlies an autobiography—it sends a signal to the reader that ‘I’m going to do everything I can to be as truthful as I can. Kernot has been shown not to be true to that implicit autobiographical undertaking.

Setting aside the facts that Watson did not write an autobiography, and that we are comparing two different forms—autobiography and biography—as far as the readership was concerned, Watson’s book did deliver on its biographical premise and Kernot’s did not. This is setting aside the fact that Kernot as a subject was not compelling enough in her own right. Jane Palfreyman, from Random House declined the publishing rights: “I was worried about the public perception of Cheryl (and we) doubted whether the book would sell the numbers required to make it worthwhile. This is interesting, as Random House had previously published David O’Reilly’s biography Cheryl Kernot: The Woman Most Likely (1998), and the book was only a modest success. Bob Sessions from Penguin concurred: “we decided to pass on offering for it because we felt her supporter base…had dissipated.”

It can be added, that if the industry belief that political books largely cater for a ‘left-leaning’ readership is correct, then Kernot’s potential market would be severely diminished by its stated agenda to expose “Canberra’s relentlessly combative, overtly masculine culture” and Labor’s marginalisation of her to a “leftover seat; the only one available after all the factional deals had been worked out”. This concentration on the deficiencies of Federal Labor also obscures the person the book is ostensibly about—Cheryl Kernot. Therefore the book fails to address a fundamental criterion of biography, which is the detailing of central events in that person’s life. As symbolised by the omission of the affair, Kernot’s book is not really biography at all:

A political biography should fill the gaps left unexplained by existing media coverage. As well as answering the big questions about a politician’s life, a political biography...should provide the minutiae of detail which adds another layer of understanding to events and

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1 Courier Mail (11-7-2002:p17).
2 Sunday Age (14-7-2002:p13).
3 Sunday Age (14-7-2002:p13).
4 The Australian (26-7-2002:p11).
5 Sunday Age (14-7-2002:p13).
personalities. One of the main problems with Kernot’s book is that it doesn’t¹.

This is more to the point. It is also very likely that, notwithstanding the difference in their relative power status, Kernot might have been as interesting a subject as Keating, if she had been upfront about her love affair. This omitted information was critical to an understanding of both her own political decisions and the secretive nature of federal politics, especially as the journalist Oakes referred to it as an “open secret” amongst the Canberra press gallery². A completion of the biographical pact would have delivered on both her implicit undertaking (writing a political autobiography) and her explicit aim (of exposing the “overtly combative, masculine culture”). Omission of central information therefore is a reneging on the biographical pact.

**Testing the limits of genre theory**

**Instance 6: artistic licence and Creative Non-Fiction**

Creative Non-Fiction represents a range of views which can be considered as being tendentious life writing³ in that they privilege a “creative, literary approach⁴ and are based in courses in creative writing and journalism⁵. Competing demands for control over life narrative seem to have coalesced into the creation of this relatively new genre⁶ which seeks to contain, describe and extend the limits of all forms of biographical writing⁷. Indeed, by including forms such as biography, autobiography and memoirs in the same genre as journalism, creative writing, travel writing and poetry, CNF has effectively blurred the delineation between stylistics and the reporting of lives. It also, theoretically at least, places pressure on the understanding of genre.

The inherent problem for genre in such inclusiveness is evident, in that creative writing and poetry, for instance, are not bound by adherence to non-fiction, and this generic blending creates unease over what criteria of non-fiction the CNF author is bound to. From a sample of university courses where CNF is taught, and from practitioners, the following parameters or descriptions are expressed:

> [CNF] is a relatively new offering...and may seem broader and more inclusive than the other genres...The terms "creative nonfiction" and "literary journalism" should serve as indicators as to the intent of our program. We would expect our students to work in any of a wide variety of styles and sub-genres such as autobiography, biography, history, speculative or personal essay, new journalism, investigative reporting/analysis and quality feature writing of the quality that appears

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¹ Freadman, quoted in: the Courier Mail (24-8-2002:pM05).
² Courier Mail (11-7-2002:p17).
⁴ University of Pittsburgh (nd).
⁵ Appendix B.
⁶ Gutkind (2007).
⁷ Gutkind (2007).

[It combines] essay form, explanation/exposition, standard rhetorical patterns...ideas and researched facts [with the] literary voice/feel story/narration, characterization, place/scene/setting; the author is personally engaged and uses artistic, instinctual and polished language.

Research thoroughly. Cultivate relationships with your subjects over a period of time to create trust, absorb information, note change, and know individuals so you can describe their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes correctly. Never invent or change facts or events. Write about real events and people to make them come alive and record them.

When a writer feels an obligation to be true to actual people, events, and places while at the same time presenting his or her own feelings honestly, the work will be creative non-fiction.

These definitions and explanations present a general adherence to factuality, and they seem consistent with Hamilton’s expansive definition of what constitutes life writing, such that there is allowance for creativity and subjectivity within biography. It would appear, however, that in practice creativity and “speculative, artistic” language could very well be, in the Bob Ellis tradition, incompatible with “never invent(ing) or chang(ing) facts or events”. This is especially true when biography and autobiography are subsumed as “sub-genres” of CNF, and not treated as intact genres within life writing, for which extensive codification already exists.

Additionally, CNF is a genre originally associated with journalism and is typically considered to be a “hybrid of journalism and non-fiction”. The problem is that it was also most famously popularised or developed by Truman Capote in his 1965 blend of journalism and fiction: *In Cold Blood*. This generic lineage to Capote is not encouraging. Certainly many claims are made for Capote’s innovativeness, including the resultant hostility which he encountered for his “blurring of the line between truth and untruth, despite [the author’s] claims of impeccable accuracy”. Indeed, the genetic/generic link to Capote suggests a rather undisciplined ancestry. Some commentators have suggested that while Capote may have instigated or otherwise sensationalised a distinctive genre with his salacious and graphic tale of murder in Middle America, there are precedents which presage both his genre and style:

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1 University of Pittsburgh (nd).
3 Lounsberry (1996:30).
5 Hamilton (2007).
7 *New York: Vintage Books*.
[Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer] were his contemporaries: “new journalism” is Wolfe’s term, coined in the mid-1960s to describe a movement of creative writing in journalism… [Mark Kramer] traces it back as far as Daniel Defoe’s writing in the 1700s, followed by that of Mark Twain in the 19th century and other writers such as James Agee, Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross and John Steinbeck in the period around World War II.

These links are not helpful, especially since the lineage from Defoe seems more like a reversion to cynical exploitation of social trust for pure financial gain: an impulse that leads to fraud. Contextually Capote was part of a wider movement in the 1960s which saw greater experimentation with the “traditional boundaries…in the field of life depiction.” This mixing of genre was described by Capote himself as either a “non-fiction novel” or a “fiction-style biography.” Capote can be compared with Shakespeare- not for their relative merits, but for the commonality of the dramatisation of lives, where the art of the narrative is foregrounded, perhaps to the exclusion of factuality. For instance, it is interesting to note that a film production of Capote’s novel appeared within one year from the book’s publication: “Capote’s work demonstrated the intimate new connection between manuscript and script…biopics became the rage.” Indeed, the latest international conference for CNF was entitled The Art of the Real, which is perhaps a perfect summation of CNF’s priorities: the art is contingent upon, but it is by definition more important than the real. Lives are dramatised, rather than documented.

This prioritisation of the narrative over the truth of the narrative’s sources is where the problem for genre arises, as it blurs the readership’s trust-entertainment distinction. Dramatisation, whether in the novel, documentary or film, typically:

Does away with documentation…it would require far too many footnotes…the dramatic artist…whether in poetry, novels, radio, film or television drama (is) blurring the lines between fiction and non-fiction (with) narrative tropes…authors and filmmakers…felt free to portray genuine lives and to explore them through fictional, filmic and other narrative techniques.

The role of creativity or imagination has been privileged in inordinate proportionality to data, which seems odd in a generic understanding, but it forms the basis of theoretical frames which seek liberation from regulation. For some, even the remotest criticism of unregulated imagination is linked to religious control. Academic and biographer Pat Shipman has asserted that “a

1 Van Jensen (2005).
5 Hosted by Newcastle University (16th-18th May, 2008).
“a good biographer has to write fiction some of the time to make apparent a significant event in someone’s life.” She included in her biography of Eugene Dubois an “imagined reaction to the death of (his) child...because I don’t think you can understand Dubois’ scientific obsession if you don’t understand what his family paid for it”\(^1\).

As an example of artistic interpretation and interpolation, the biopic seems to be, according to the French academic Elise Domenach, suitable for radical treatment. According to her, Dahan’s depiction of Edith Piaf\(^2\) is a matter of art, regardless of its inventions of central characters, omission of critical events (including the subject’s infanticide of her own daughter), and liberal treatment of the subject, because it is the director’s autobiography as well:

There are two ways of approaching a biography...from the inside or the exterior...either chronologically or from the wide viewpoint, an existence. The director aims for faithfulness to the human being. He has said in interviews ‘Yes, it is completely autobiographical...it depicts my own life, my own struggles with my art. It could not have been more about my own life...the invention of characters follows from the simple logic of human relations...I’m interested in a take on Edith, not a life of Edith\(^3\).

It is not certain whether the typical reader is aware of this type of invention, but there is some notion that readers can identify authorial interference. They are now “more keenly aware of the myth-making accomplished by (such texts as) films”\(^4\). If the readership of biography is indeed more sophisticated, it is difficult to justify interpolation or “mediation”\(^5\) of the text under the criteria of a biographical pact, unless there it is also evidenced that an implicit understanding exists for this tendentious rendering of a life. This raises the question of whether the biopic occupies a different generic location to the standard literary biography, in which case the biographical pact seems to be modified by its context: but this would require a compensatory increase in the readership’s cultural/informational literacy.

It is certainly not explicit in the title of Dahan’s film, which is titled La Vie en Rose: the passionate life of Edith Piaf\(^6\). The definite article the in the passionate life has strict reference, suggesting that the film represents the only/correct version of that life; and implicitly that the passionate life is a more accurate reading amongst less passionate readings. Perhaps there does exist a readership understanding that they are only seeing an authored version of history, but the assertiveness with which that life is presented as art is quite possibly also very persuasive. If that text is read in isolation, there is no reason why it wouldn’t achieve truth value for a substantial readership. Cate Blanchett, the celebrated actress, refers to her role in the Elizabeth biopics as

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\(^1\) Shipman (2004).
\(^2\) Legende Productions France (2007).
\(^3\) As quoted in Dahan (2007).
\(^5\) Temple (2008).
\(^6\) Legende Productions France (2007).
being part of a “fable…it's not the same as reading a biography…in a film you are being told a fable, and one through the eyes of the director”¹. The question is whether the viewer is aware of this fable-isation. Similarly, the film critic Sandra Hall reviewed the 2009 film based on the life of Coco Chanel² as being:

A film best viewed as a beguiling fairy tale about a woman who loved fashion…most biopics are vehicles heavily freighted with compromise…you hope you’ll be transported to a place so seductive the gap between truth and fantasy will cease to matter…by concentrating on the young Chanel, the film is able to ignore the more unappealing aspects of her personality³.

Biopics, then, present an interesting contradiction. They seek to follow the aesthetic priority which is the defence of CNF, but this is only applicable if the reader of such a text fully understands that this is a part of the subtext. If not, then the aesthetic alibi, covering omissions, inventions and other directorial subjectivities, is open to allegations of misrepresentation; perhaps even, because so much money is involved, it is a type of fraud. For instance, is there an understanding that the reader is entitled to a refund if they find the biopic un-historical?

It is asserted that there is, contemporarily, a discernible trend towards the “anti-teleological” in historical film and media, a “series of perpetual presents and historical amnesia” which is consistent with CNF and postmodernism⁴. It offers “an interesting approach to history or a substitute”⁵, or a “filmic artist biography (which) almost always has an element of titillation and spectacle” rather than chronology or factuality⁶. As to whether the biopic offers an alternative teaching of history, which readers are now accepting as real, the answer is not yet determined. Perhaps the question of just how sophisticated the readership is for biopics, is similar to the question of whether audiences perceive filmic violence as real⁷. It would be interesting to see whether Cate Blanchett is accurate when she claims that:

It's terrifying that we are growing up with this very illiterate bunch of children, who are somehow being taught that film is fact, when in fact it's invention. Hopefully though an historical film will inspire people to go and read about the history. But in the end it is a work of history and selection⁸.

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² Coco Avant Chanel (2009): Anne Fontaine (director).
³ The Sydney Morning Herald (25-6-2009:p11).
⁴ Landy (2001:10,218).
⁵ Syme (1974:1).
⁷ Daly (2008) and Luke (1990) are examples of the Neuroscientific debate which links violence to media exposure. The same debate could be begun over the teaching of history via biopics.
⁸ Blanchett (2007).
This is an obvious contradiction of her claim that the biopic is understood as a fable. A critic has also lamented the fact that: "the conspiracy-minded, fact-warping movies of Oliver Stone are regarded by those who don’t know better as genuine history, as are the most sensationalistic of television docudramas"¹.

This is proposing a pedagogical, scholarship and generic dilemma, which does not yet seem to be established, but is worth pursuing. Meanwhile, in the pursuit of artistic freedom, there is little or no mention of the duty of the artist to either the material or to the subject. The insistence on creativity as an inalienable artistic right sets itself up therefore as oppositional to the rights of the person thus portrayed and the rights of the readership, who understand that biographical "storytelling" must rely on factuality². In response to the claims of artistic licence, Jack Robertson, a well established author in Australia, has dismissed the pretensions of the aesthetic argument as the result of:

A lack of talent. Not enough creative firepower to invent everything from scratch and keep an audience interested. Not enough focus, endurance, discipline and intellectual honesty to get all the facts right, however aesthetically or ideologically inconvenient³.

This level of indeterminacy may appeal to a certain type of reader, and its location within the academy as a subject is certainly amenable to the postmodern reading⁴. The central problem with CNF is that, with its various and vague ideas of factuality, it has no inbuilt codification which would bind it to strict observance of the biographical pact. This relativism of any reading of a life being equivalent to any other is contingent upon the aesthetic defence. Perhaps the biographer’s art really does require more talent than the CNF artist who is unable to successfully integrate narrative talent with factuality. The other dilemma is that if such art produces a genre viable in its own right, it is a false biography based on entertainment, and low accountability, catering for short attention spans in the age of "rapid processing of information" and superficiality⁵. It thus tends to compete with the studied, disciplined art of literary biography which by comparison is accountable to its sources, readers and subject. And finally, there is the discursive metonymic presumption of proponents of CNF, who, as a minority field of tendentious life writing, seek to claim that CNF includes or represents some if not all other modes and styles of life writing⁶. By contrast, The Encyclopaedia of Life Writing accords CNF a listing of only a few pages⁷; and this perhaps, indicates better than any other assessment, its relative importance, compared with the diversity and inclusiveness of life writing overall.

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¹ Kakutani (2006).
³ Robertson (2009).
⁴ Garber (1996:172-175).
⁵ Landy (2001:218).
⁶ University of Pittsburgh (nd); Appendix B.
Some conclusions on genre

Evidence has been presented for the way in which biography has become increasingly distinct from all other social practices rising from relative obscurity to its current status as an independent and powerful medium for expression. Despite its ownership or location within the categories of history or literature, typically as a sub-genre, and typically as a framework for scholarship, it is certainly a fact that in the non-academic world, contemporarily biography is treated as a stand-alone genre; that is, a distinct category of literary practice. The understanding or consensus, therefore for consumers, retailers, libraries and producers is that biography constitutes a genre with distinct form and content, and that there is no other genre which can be confused with it. Or, it seems that for most people, a text is either biography, or it is not.

It has been shown that, while other literary genres afford a great deal of creativity and generic overlapping, biography as a genre has become, if anything, increasingly resistant to change. It jealously guards its non-fiction credentials and has reasserted empiricism as a social expectation, in open defiance of external pressure from the academy. Essentially, biography represents a commemorative text which asks from the reader an acquiescence in the proposition of belief\(^1\): but that this is a proposition that is unpopular with a sizable portion of the literature-academy.

Since this kernel of functionality lies at the heart of biography, it is hardly surprisingly that the genre has come in for special criticism. It asserts a fundamental foundation of non-contestable fact: not least, that the named person demonstrably lived and died. Indeed there is an overwhelmingly factual consistency, even an empiricist tradition amongst contemporary biography which argues in favour of the genre’s non-fiction basis; the fact that fraud is controversial indicates a wide consensus amongst practitioners and consumers. At its core, then, biography is uncontroversial: it presents factual information which is transparent in both its data collection and in its assertions.

There is a duality in biography which has been commented on by the academy. The identification of life writing as a distinct genre can be alternatively viewed as an example of social action which is entirely located within the discourse of the community that produced it. Or, to fully understand what a biography is, the reader must have a prior understanding of what biography generically entails in a cultural sense. The conclusion has been that this signifies life writing as entirely arbitrary and conventional, responding to social construction, reproducing and reinforcing social norms. However, the other interpretation of this continuity of social convention which is found in life writing is that social norms are actually responsive to the fundamental humanness of each person. That is, the core human needs for social trust and

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\(^1\) This is my term for the suspension of disbelief in the specific sense for the non-fictional basis of biography.
validation are expressed and are satisfied by the truth conditions of this genre. Theories of DA have helped to support this conclusion, offering keys to understanding human interaction as linguistic transactions, and biography is related to central interaction requiring co-operation and reciprocation. The genre of biography is a product of communicative need, and patterns of life writing produce conventions, not the other way round.

Theoretically and demonstrably, genre can be manipulated as any other arbitrary and conventional social product. Biography, however, has remained largely immutable. There must be certain signals within or external to the text which alert the reader to the types of generic frame with which they can read that biographical text. There is also an apparently sophisticated readership which can adequately decode and filter elements of subjectivity, and there is a tolerance, perhaps even expectation that these elements will be present. This may outwardly appear to be the same thing as a tolerance of fictionalising. The difference is intentionality. An author may set out deliberately to write an account which is overtly interpretative, tendentious or subjective. It seems that if the author is transparent in this aim there is acceptance among readers. There is no tolerance for creative relativism whereby the author assumes that any telling of a life is equivalent to any other telling of a life, either for scholarship, raconteur ability or intrinsic interest. In this the literature is at odds with the readership, and is prescriptive beyond discursive representation. The bizarre logic in generating a version of a life only to remove oneself from accountability for that account by hiding behind relativism, or aesthetic licence is entirely fraudulent. Perhaps this makes biography unique amongst genres: the potential for variation may be narrower than any other genre; it is the subject of the biography rather than the treatment, which distinguishes one text from another.

If we apply these ideas to biography then it can be seen that the generic appellation supplies its own discourse: by extension, any work of biographical appearance is generated by biographical intent. If there is inconsistency between intent and production, or between expectation and product, then the particular text has failed to meet generic criteria. The persistence of this consensus, or agreed definition for the extent and qualities of biography makes it a remarkably durable genre.
CHAPTER 3  Biography as Mythology and Ideology

Introduction:

This chapter will further develop the premise that biography fills a human need which is not purely explainable by ideas of arbitrariness, conventionality and cultural construction, and that life writing as understood by the overwhelming majority of its readership is increasingly estranged from the academy’s reading of biography. By examining more closely the disparity between the academic and the popular readings of life writing, it will be manifested that the literary approach to biography has moved further and further away from both biography’s central functionality and its wider manifestations. This stance against popular biography will be considered as anti-democratic, and this concept will be elaborated on. It will be asserted here that the notions of myth and ideology are currently deployed in the academic literature as highly negative and exaggerated labels which exclude the greater balance of biography. By contrast, it will be suggested that life writing has always been conscious of both the presence and utility of myth and ideology, but that these items are contextually understood as constructs. It will then be asserted that the uses of ideology in the contemporary canonical teaching of life writing are elitist, exclusive and artificial constructs themselves.

Post-modernism defined as a generic label for contemporary literary theory

There is general agreement in the academy that a fundamental theoretical shift has developed in the Humanities over recent decades\(^1\). This is particularly true for literary theory, and because life writing is most typically taught at the tertiary level as a form of literature, it is necessary to investigate more closely the ways in which it is read:

Epistemological upheavals in the humanities in recent decades have made scholars critical about the traditional assumptions of biography. Critics argue that the coherence of life as presented in a traditional biography is illusory—created by papering over the cracks, concealing the unknown, and making causal connections that stem from the mind of the biographer rather than from the subject. Not only do lives not have the neat trajectory that the biographer typically aspires to achieve, but the personalities—“selves”—of the subject are fragmented and shifting rather than unitary and coherent, defying any biographical aspiration to identify the “real” person\(^2\).

The often generalised label of post-modernism seems to be over-used and even less understood as an emblematic feature of post-war literary and social

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\(^1\) Jolly (2001); Abrams (1988); Hamilton (2007)(2008); Bennett & Royle (2004).
Theory. Usage of the term itself has become synthesised from various 20th century theoretical positions and movements implicitly or explicitly including tenets from Marxism, post-Marxism, neo-Marxism, Feminism, New wave Feminism, post-Feminism, Realism, Structuralism, Formalism, Post-Structuralism, Deconstruction, (etc). However much a purist might resent theoretical “conflation” as a feature of conspiratorial, “paternalistic revenge”, post-modernism is, in practice, evidently a functional label incorporative of other forms of thought which typically exist in parallel, but which also occur sometimes even in conflicting strands. Of course, this position is informed by the fact that the shorthand term is also employed as a form of invective by ideological detractors. More commonly, however it is used by proponents of post-modernism, as a form of abbreviation, and for convenience in referentiality only.

The label post-modernism will suffice in this context therefore as a reference for the set of prevailing academic theoretical approaches which function almost as an integrated category in seeking to understand the constructedness of discourse formation and texts. As a functional set of contemporaneous theories, post-modernism also promises a special applicability to the production and acceptance of life writing:

Postmodernism is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice... a "grand narrative" masks the constructedness of these categories by explaining that "disorder" REALLY IS chaotic and bad, and that "order" REALLY IS rational and good. Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favors "mini-narratives," stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability.

(It places) an emphasis on chance and contingency as fundamental conditions of our being and a positing of aesthetics rather than rationalism as guide to truth...There (is) a greater awareness of history as a narrative, that is, a human construct; history is accessible to us, but only as text -- its documents are texts, its institutions are social texts. This does not mean that history did not happen; it means that what we know as history is known to us only through what is configured for our understandings by language, by narratives with their own shaping forces, by figures of speech, an insistence on the incarnate and the contingent.

2 Butler (2002); Jolly (2001); Abrams (1988).
3 Butler (1993).
4 Currie (1998); Buchbinder (1991); Butler (2002).
5 This is especially true for Jolly (2001).
6 Klages (2007), capitalisation and spelling retained.
7 Lye (1999).
It is apparent from this type of definition that a certain amount of telescoping of theory has occurred yet the challenge to biography is clear. Postmodernism is opposed to commonality and independent truth-meaning in narrative. It offers instead merely a “fragmentary, non-totalising and non-teleological” narrative. As discussed previously, any significant disruption of the lineal event sequencing in narrative structure also tends to undermine sense causation, but this is part of what is being proposed here. The question then arises as to how prevalent such theory is across the academy where life writing is taught.

A consensus identified in the literature

Various theorists have commented on the importance of post-modernism’s role in various disciplines through the academy. Indeed, it would appear that as a tool of academic enquiry, post-modernism is indispensable: its dissemination throughout much of academia finds it in various applications through “cultural forms, political thought, philosophy, aesthetic criticism and theory, anthropology, geography, historiography, theology, pedagogy (etc)”

This, significantly, includes various discussions in the literature on the subject of biography. Even those who dissent from many of post-modernism’s assumptions and conclusions are obliged to acknowledge it in the act of dissent, such is its central position in the canon of discussion. The idea of post-modernism as being prevalent in so many areas of academic enquiry indicates that a consensus has been arrived at. This appears to be treated very much like an accomplished fact, such that disciplines applied to any discussion of literature and history, in particular, are dominated, if not controlled completely, by post-modernism as an obligatory concessive act.

This is not to say that the literature remains exclusively post-modernist, but that it is dominated by it as a form of majority-consensus. The notion of an international collegiality or academic convergence in the Humanities forming an approving consensus on the merits of post-modernism does seem to be prevalent in the literature, although some of the claims supporting this position evidently come, significantly, from dissenting commentators. When taken in isolation these dissenting voices could be easily dismissed: however when taken in conjunction with the overwhelmingly positive assertions of the advocate position, they can be seen as contributory and validating evidence. Further evidence can be found among the other non-literary critics of post-modernism, such as Chomsky and Hitchens. Said also effectively argued a

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2. Winchell (1996); Pekacz (2004); Butler (2002); Jolly (2001); Abrams (1988); Bennett & Royle (2004); Park (2006).
5. Freadman (2001)(2003); Adams (2008) and Hamilton (2007) in particular have debated the application of post-modernism to biography.
7. Freadman (2001)(2003); Adams (2008); Bendle (2009) and Hamilton (2007); while others such as Jolly (2001) and Batchelor (2003) appear to catalogue balanced opinions.
a parallel case for post-modernism when he claimed “that there is no such thing as disinterested knowledge and understanding untainted by considerations of interest and power”\textsuperscript{1}. The significance of post-modernism in the literature therefore cannot be understated. The potential, net effect of a powerful consensus can be seen as operative in the gatekeeper role as a type of orthodoxy and hegemony:

Implying a faithful reflection (but is also) a filter or gatekeeper, acting to select parts of experience for special attention and closing off other views and voices, whether deliberately or not\textsuperscript{2}.

This comment suggests that such a consensus operates to exclude dissenting voices, while signalling an exclusivity or collectively powerful identity\textsuperscript{3}. This is a view backed up by a closer examination of the discursive constructions employed in post-modernist generalisations such as the presumptive “we”\textsuperscript{4} and “those” which locate the interlocutor in an essential decision of location: if we are not one of the ‘we’ then we automatically are excluded from the speech community and its collective identity, with all of the connotations of deictic exclusivity-inclusivity it entails. This tendency within the post-modern academy has been, with some justification, described as an “intellectual monoculture”\textsuperscript{5}: which sounds like an accusation or criticism, but it is not. It is an interesting admission by a senior literary academic who actually endorses post-modernism as one tool of enquiry, but who is criticising the homogenising influence of an overpowering consensus which seeks to silence dissent and constructive debate\textsuperscript{6}. This is also suggestive that there are dissenters, but that these are not prominent in the literature or pedagogy of life writing. There is a perception that debate suffers because a consensus has been reached and that it is enforced to a high level.

A post-modernist caveat and the value of the academy

In the balance of this thesis I will present evidence for the argument that there exists a tendentious post-modernist academy which is unrepresentative of the academy overall, and disloyal to the central aims of post-modernism itself. In postulating the presence of an academic consensus, it is necessary to look closer at the implications of such a consensus for the discussion of life writing, and also to qualify what post-modernism means to its proponents within the academy. Indeed, ‘pinning down’ a standardised definition is an elusive task. Defining the Western academy as “not one world (but) also a radical heterogeneity” is useful in indicating that, at its best, the academy is not only highly reflexive and progressive, but also accommodating of diverse systems of thought\textsuperscript{7}. This is especially evident in the variety of opinion within the academy as to what post-modernism signifies. It would appear that the

\textsuperscript{1} As quoted in: Hollander (2006:320).
\textsuperscript{2} McQuail (2005:83).
\textsuperscript{3} Radosh (2001:118-160).
\textsuperscript{4} Freadman (2002).
\textsuperscript{5} Bendle (2009).
\textsuperscript{6} Bendle (2009).
\textsuperscript{7} Spivah (1988:xvii).
general appeal of post-modernism for academics is this flexibility of definition, or its “undecidability…the impossibility of deciding between two or more competing interpretations…our ability to make a decision…is at least temporarily suspended…it gives new attention to the value of the undecidable”\(^1\). In many ways this suspension of decision is consistent with the traditional role of the academic space, in that a dialogue is opened with the data\(^2\). It certainly opens the academy to a plurality of ways of seeing, or reading, or a “politics of difference (which) can emerge within a shared discourse of democratic public life”\(^3\). I would argue that the role of the academy remains undiminished, and arguably enlarged, by post-modernism, but that the potential exists for a narrowing of what post-modernism signifies, such that the focus of enquiry can easily furnish the frame for and then actually become the prescriptive lens for viewing the data. Indeed, the seed of this “post-modern ethical paradox” is a:

Genuine practical dilemma: acting on one’s moral convictions is naturally pregnant with a desire to win for such convictions an ever more universal acceptance; but every attempt to do just that smacks of the already discredited bid for domination\(^4\).

Thus, the post-modernist ideal, of being open to other ways of seeing and allowing undecidability, has an inherent capacity for being hijacked to mean whatever its proponents wish it to be, and therefore the potential for becoming yet another positivist frame which excludes all others.

I would argue that it is this (very human) tendency to be “indifferent”, reactionary or positivist, which has become a reality in the discussion of life writing in the academy\(^5\). Indeed, one feature of the *tendentious post-modern academy*\(^6\) dealing with biography is its prescription of ways of reading biography. Another feature is this section of the academy’s lack of engagement with informal and popular life writing. This highly influential sector of the academy has proscribed life writing outside the canon of biographical texts deemed worthy of tertiary study. Tellingly, this canon consists of texts produced (mostly) by members of the academy itself, or by persons whose texts are amenable to the prescriptivist view.

This tendency to privileging narratives emanating from within the academy from persons whose contributions to the academy are considered as being significant seems counter-productive, given the iconoclastic tradition of Strachey, Woolf and Capote (for instance) which has always informed the modern literature on life writing. Indeed, the idea that post-modernism “favors ‘mini-narratives’: stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts (they are) situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or

\(^1\) Bennett & Royle (2004:249).
\(^3\) Giroux (1991:6).
\(^6\) Hereafter abbreviated to the ‘tendentious academy’ where possible.
stability”, is belied by the literature’s insistence on certain ways of reading biography.

I would assert that the notion of ignoring popular writing on the basis that it is not ‘good’ is disloyal to the idea of post-modernism itself. It is in popular writing that ‘little narratives’, unprocessed by theory and self-consciousness, are most likely to be found. In addition, I assert that this exclusion of the majority of life writing is contrary to both the understanding of what it means to be an academic, and disloyal to the sophisticated links existing between the canon, popular life writing and the intense discourse operative beneath the vulnerability of sharing memory as an essential human need. Or, to put it another way, the academic canon of biographical texts may very well be the best of all life writing, but we have no way of knowing if this is true, or even on what selection criteria-basis this canonisation was made. Academia needs to engage with popular life writing, not because it is ‘good’, which most of it probably (if not demonstrably) is not, but because it is significant as social praxis. Its significance is both symbolic and real. It is symbolic of democratic power, human rights and social change. It is expressive of individual experience and relationships. It is significant for what it represents at the personal, social and speech community level. It is also consistent with post-modernism’s aims, which is to attach relevance to the undecidability of the raw data, leaving the significance to the interpretation of that data by the person making the utterance and to the reader. To fail to engage with this development in life writing is not only a betrayal of post-modernism itself, but also a failure of the academy’s critical role. Indeed, such a condition offers some justification in describing the academy as an “intellectual monoculture”\(^2\), regardless of the variegated nature of post-modernism as articulated in the academy overall.

As part of this assertion, it is critical to examine more closely the nature of this hegemony enjoyed by the tendentious post-modern academy, which I will present evidence for as being a powerful, homogenising force within the wider academy which actually stifles debate in a manner and with a motivation which is directly oppositional to the traditional norms of the academy with its pluralistic and inclusive aims. This is principally because it is operative at the pedagogical and research levels. In its controlling and “tribalistic”\(^3\) nature, the tendentious post-modern academy is understandably a product of human nature and almost inevitable as an interpretation of post-modernism itself, but it is not accurate in its representation of post-modernism overall. In fact it could be described as a mis-reading of post-modernism’s central inspiration and legacy. Nevertheless, its extent and effects need to be addressed.

**Tendentious, privileged texts as evidence of academic control**

There are two major evidences for the scale of control exerted by the tendentious post-modernist academy. The first is in the selection of theory, as

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1 Klages (2007).
evidenced previously and the second is in the reinforcement of this selection, through the privileging of certain texts. In both instances, there is the underlying assertion that these theories and texts are canonical. Of course a selection dilemma exists for any canonisation of texts. The traditional selection of literary texts as “classic” has been criticised for reproducing “an ideological justification of the values, often racist, heterosexist, patriarchal, colonial and elitist, of the male, Western, establishment figures which it enshrines”. Noting that any canon of literature, as an expression of genre, will reflect the values of its culture, it is hardly likely that the tendentious post-modernist selection of privileged texts would be any less ideological than the canons it criticises: “literary scholars make their own canon (which is) always an ideologically conditioned version”. Indeed, in the courses offered across Australian universities, it is evident that certain biographical authors are preferred: for instance Gosse, Strachey, Woolf, and Capote; while Boswell is typically omitted. This type of selection is labelled “tendentious” by Donaldson, who includes these authors, but in a much longer list. Other commentators also include these authors only as examples of a much wider life writing tradition. The conclusion is obvious: that to focus narrowly on these “anti-biographers” is to limit any discussion of life writing solely to authors compatible with tendentious post-modernism.

Precedents exist for this type of narrow prescriptivism, where the canon matches cultural mores. Indeed, Lytton Strachey is usually championed as the “pioneer of modern biography”, writing against the previous canonical Victorian “monumentalising tradition” with “the new weapon of irony”. It is also true that his essays were reactionary, and therefore no less ideologically motivated than the “aristocratic tradition of the eighteenth century (which) had reached a very advanced stage of decomposition”. Strachey wrote:

from a slightly cynical…irreligious…standpoint…I have sought to examine and elucidate certain fragments of the truth which took my fancy and lay to my hand…the explorer of the past will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined… It is not his business to be complimentary.

Oddly, Strachey also claimed to dissect his subjects “dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior motives”, which is illogical given his overt

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1 Bennett & Royle (2004:48).
3 Appendix B.
5 Batchelor (2003); Jolly (2001); Hamilton (2007).
9 Eminent Victorians (1918).
12 Strachey (1988: 8).
agenda. For instance: “Everyone knows the popular conception...the saintly, self-sacrificing woman, but the truth was different...a demon possessed her...it was very odd; what could be the matter with dear Flo?”¹ His employment of the informal colloquial register and familiarity marker “dear Flo” are deliberate derogatory devices, as is his description of her as “the rounded, bulky form of a fat old lady, smiling all day long”². It is claimed that his innovation was in “elegant, sceptical essays with a touch of the caricaturist’s art...the slightly malicious wit”³. This comparison is hyperbolic, unless Strachey’s category of biography exhibits ‘elegance’ in the same way that newspaper cartoons can be described as a form of art. Rather than a model of biography, as it is privileged in the academy, Strachey’s “filter” should more properly be regarded as an interesting diversion, but ultimately also “a dead end for biography”⁴.

Edmund Gosse is foregrounded in the academy as an innovator in Freudian psychoanalytical biography, a style which “got off to a scandalous start when Sigmund Freud ‘outed’ Leonardo da Vinci as a homosexual in a 1910 biography”⁵. The fashion of psychobiography persisted until the 1980s⁶. Authors such as Edel, Erikson, Namier and Painter invested their biographies with Freudian principles of analysis, but some of their interpretations have been rejected⁷. For instance Namier sought to understand the mental condition of King George III in Freudian terms, but subsequent medical opinion asserts that the monarch’s condition was predominantly caused by a chemical imbalance comparable to schizophrenia⁸. Another criticism of psychobiography is that the biographer will seek only to project what is already assumed, ignoring any evidence to the contrary. One commentator describes this practice as “hazardous”, a “posthumous diagnosis...the difficulty with psychohistory is that instead of representing history as an influence upon the individual, it makes history a kind of Greek chorus confirming what is already assumed to be there”⁹. There is an almost total absence of historiography because their research is negated by a misguided agenda unresponsive to material evidence: “Sartre says, if it didn’t happen this way, it happened in some way like it; Erikson says, if it didn’t happen, it as good as happened”¹⁰. Another commentator has remarked: “If we are too confident in our judgements of character we actually end up writing instead of (biography) a kind of speculative teleology: what he should have done had he lived differently or longer”¹¹. In such cases, the very basis of the biography is compromised by a questionable proposition: if not useless, the text is certainly devalued as a biographical work, regardless of its narrative appeal. As well, they are subject to revision, as shown in the comments of D.H. Lawrence.

⁵ Hamilton (2007:143).
⁸ West (1973:7-8).
⁹ Ellman (1973:7-8,11).
¹⁰ Ellman (1973:9).
who was influenced by Freudian principles in his own work, only to regret the resultant imprecision in the depiction of his father¹.

Virginia Woolf, another experimenter with psychobiography, maintains a favoured status in the academy for her exploration of gender and sex:

As one of a number of artistic minds determined to liberate literature from its shackles and introduce a more open discussion of human intimacy…it sprung upon me how I could liberate biography in a night…it’s all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind².

Woolf’s essays on biography sought to advance “the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, and the failure”³, as well as strongly focusing on the intimate internal life⁴, which all have obvious appeal to the contemporary academy. Still, how much of this “pioneering” status is deserved is not clear, since in her anti-teleology and anti-linearity, “like Strachey (and Barthes), Woolf offered no real way forward for biographers”⁵.

The same could be said for Truman Capote, who, instead of showing the way forward with creative non-fiction, managed to finish only one, briefly popular, item of biography, before disappearing into obscurity⁶:

The aesthetic decision Capote made, at the sacrifice of his relationship with others…brings to the fore the question of the (mis-) use of facts for poetic purpose—the ethics of aestheticizing the real world. Language leaks into reality and binds lives to it. Creative mind and sleight of hand can turn out to be malicious and do injustice to the world. The characters in a true-life story do not only inhabit, and constitute part of, the story world, but can be further referred to and traced back to flesh-and-blood individuals⁷.

Despite the evident and inherent problems of being creative with the lives of other people, Capote still figures prominently in the academy, but is not remembered outside of it forty years later⁸. The success of the film could be attributed to a certain novelty, revivalist mood in the baby-boomer generation, rather than any luminescence for the general public. Indeed, Capote himself (in his subsequent ‘anti-celebrity’ life-exit from the limelight) furnishes evidence against the ‘uses of Capote’ in the tendentious academy. The fact that Capote relinquished his newly developed genre, having apparently exhausted himself emotionally and psychologically through becoming so heavily involved with his subject/s, argues quite convincingly against major

¹ Lawrence (1994:2-3).
genre subversion for life writing. There is perhaps, much more at stake for the biographer than some Capote-philes may realise.

There is then, a tension between method and genre. This tends to increasingly fix the discursive gap between the canonical treatment of mere tamperings with biography, and what is recognised beyond the tendentious academy as life writing. It seems that fleeting biographical variation is absorbed into the history of biography, but that life writing as a wider social practice moves on, largely unaffected by the tendentious academy’s favourites: “Many leading biographers (choose) to pursue their work outside the academy, removed from the distractions of university administration and the discouraging glances of more theoretically minded colleagues.”¹

Donaldson even goes so far as to assert that the life writing academy is “managed largely by historians, never by post-modernist scholars”². Whether these conflicting perceptions are reconcilable is perhaps not the issue; rather they serve to evidence that life writing commentators are well aware of the tendentious part of the academy which seeks to remodel the canon and the literature in its own image. It also evidences that the academy, in its (presumably post-modernist) scope and inclusiveness, is also susceptible to manipulation by some commentators who impose a reductive and exclusive reading of post-modernism itself, which is then applied through the teaching of biography at the university level.

This would justify the conclusion that the special treatment of these marginal trends by the tendentious academy tends to the ‘self-marginalising’, and to alienate the rest of the academy by default. Privileged biography risks becoming just another, outmoded form of didactic, ideological teaching of life writing seeking to “not only describe, but connect; not only to narrate, but philosophise”: even “suspect as a form of reductionist biography itself”³.

The inherent risk here is that to interpret a subject through fashionable theory leaves the author stranded in or limited to a particular time and place. The biography quickly becomes anachronistic: this is especially true when diachronically reading a life. To locate the subject in the ideas or moods contemporary to the author is to make a serious misjudgement: “[the author] must not import alien attitudes and values so that the past is distorted into a reflection of the present. In short, the past has to be understood on its own terms”⁴.

What is not certain is whether the tendentious academy is self-aware for its gatekeeper/elitist stance, or whether it is and thus revels in this role. There is, after all, an anti-biographical thread in this elitism. The contradictions are exemplified by the public utterances of Eagleton, a champion of post-modernism, who insisted that biography is:

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⁴ West (1973:7).
Of course, ultimately self-defeating… most individual existences are routine and unremarkable … Biographies cannot help reminding us, in the very act of distilling the uniqueness of their subjects, of just what tediously generic creatures they are"1.

Later he published his Strachey-style memoir, entitled The Gatekeeper2, which is a reference to his duties as a boy at a Carmelite convent; but the contradiction is in his refusal to deconstruct himself. As a ‘reflexive memoir’ it ironically doesn’t reflect on either his adult academic gatekeeper role or the fact that he is writing a biography, which he considers to be an “ultimately self-defeating” act.

The consensus in the tendentious literature as generative for the premise of a wider Western cultural homogeneity

This is not the only inherent contradiction in the tendentious post-modernist academy. From this tendentious consensus there has developed a prevailing idea that a degree of homogeneity must therefore exist for dominant philosophical stances in contemporary Western civilisation as a whole. That is, from this consensus there is obtained an extrapolated conclusion whereby the rest of society outside the tendentious academy is ‘imagined’ into an identical discursive framework. Indeed, it is evident in the literature that Western culture is defined as being post-modernist3 in totality; an ideological condition apparently occurring across all social-genre-domain structures, although nowhere in the literature is this precisely quantified. This may be because the very fluidities and subjectivities inherent and highly valued within post-modernism make it an ideology which is unverifiable or unmeasurable4. Indeed, how one would empirically test such a set of values across so many discursive domains present in Western society is problematic, to say the least5. Nevertheless, and without any reference to such an empirical measuring process, either hypothetically or practically, it is apparent that just such an assumption has been made in the literature and it is expressed as a macro-event:

Contemporary life, at least in the world’s most affluent and ‘developed’ societies…referred to as ‘Late Modernity’ (or) postmodernity (has experienced) a fundamental realignment…in how knowledge is assumed to be constituted (including) a weakening in confidence in traditional ways of explaining…a falling off of intellectual security…a sort of forensic activity, with a libertarian political slant6.

Contemporary Western discourse is characteristically unstable, fragmented, dispersed- not a world-view at all…grand narratives have

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1 Donaldson (2006:26).
4 Butler & Scott (1992:3-21).
6 Jaworski & Coupland (2006:3-5).
all but lost their efficacy...legitimation is now plural, local and contingent¹.

The post-modern valuing of the local and the particular, the provisional and the tentative, is said to contest modernity’s privileging of the general and the universal...hierarchy and system are put into question, as intellectual grounds and foundations crumble...in the predominantly white, metropolitan cultures of the Europeanised West².

This generalised notion is expressed by other established, authoritative authors, and it seems to underpin much of contemporary thought in the literature³. Or, to put it another way, there is a strident view in the literature that a new Establishment or Academy has overthrown the supposedly positivist⁴ and therefore inherently flawed, old establishment-academy. It is a view which postulates that in the West a “new Empire...a new paradigm of power, a post-modern sovereignty has come to rule through different hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities⁵.

The consensus for a homogeneity in Western discourse questioned

This sounds like an accomplished fact. Nevertheless, precisely how academia, as a social-discursive minority, or self-described social elite⁶, is synthesised-synchronised with the balance of discursive structures across Western society is not detailed in these claims in the literature. It is possible, of course, to find some qualification of this dominant stance, such that the totality of Western contemporary discourse is seen as being led by some indeterminate “predominantly white, metropolitan”⁷ community in the “most affluent and developed societies”⁸, although this type of utterance could in turn be seen as ultimately a meaningless distinction and generalisation in the overall context of a Western, pluralistic society.

How deep and wide in acceptance, how variegated experientially, and how much exposure conceptually or subconsciously for discrete expressions of post-modernism there actually is across speech communities in Western society, is not measured, and indeed may well be, ultimately, beyond measurement. The first problem with the assumption therefore, is that it is typically made by commentators without multidisciplinary expertise in the areas that they are remarking on, and that no evidence is supplied to back the claim either for qualification or quantification. Note that Bendle, in his allegation of intellectual monoculture, is attacked for his non-Humanities background⁹: this is excellent inductive evidence for the allegation itself.

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¹ Bennett & Royle (2004:251).
⁴ Eagleton (1996).
⁸ Jaworski & Coupland (2006:3-5).
⁹ Davis (2008).
Neither is the premise framed in terms of a hypothesis, but as established fact, which is counterintuitive reasoning.

From the literature for Sociolinguistics, for example, comes the idea that the only constant for developed societies and communities in contact, is constant change itself\(^1\), and there is no evidence warranting the declaration that this change could be synchronised with academic discursive structures\(^2\). The idea idea of society moving in synchronised fashion with History-Literature is alien to the realities of social domains studied across numerous human societies\(^3\). This is a significant problem for the premise, as the idea of social domains reflecting or subverting speech community divisions is a standard feature of sociolinguistic enquiry\(^4\). Or to put it another way, discourse is not fixed spatially or temporally, is not inert or static, but shifts and varies according to context\(^5\), including interlocutors, and social structures are notoriously complex, occasionally transitory-unstable and often unpredictable\(^6\). A variety of discourses is represented in any society in contact with other societies therefore, with no indication that the elite academy discourse prevails in a normative role, nor any reason why it should\(^7\).

As suggested above, the consensus in the tendentious literature is open to question, since social structures and discursive formations vary so much in a “society in contact such as Australia or the USA”\(^8\). The important distinction between the plurality and multiplicity of social discourses and cultural production of artefacts\(^9\) is not detailed in the literature, although passing reference is made to it as being symptomatic and generative of social change\(^10\).

The significance of this discussion is that there is little reason to suppose that post-modernism has been disseminated in any real discursive sense, from the academy to the wider community. In the application to the readership of biography, it is even less likely that there is any synchronicity between the tendentious academy and the wider community. Rather it is more likely that the general readership of biography is placing a discursive pressure on the academy for the reading of biography. Exactly what type of pressure this entails, and whether this pressure is even being acknowledged, will now be examined.

\(^1\) Holmes (2008:178-219).
\(^2\) Indeed, quite the opposite, once the idea of discrete speech communities/discourse formation and identity is consulted. The number and variety of diverse speech communities is indicative of extremely complex social structures, especially in Western societies. In: Cameron et al (1992).
\(^3\) This is tied to hierarchical structures for gender, age, status, background, ethnicity (etc), which exist in any culture but more particularly in diverse communities in contact, as delineated in Cameron et al (1992); Holmes (2008).
\(^4\) Habermas (1998).
\(^8\) Holmes (2008:208-219).
The assumed Western discourse interrogated

While acknowledging the immense task involved in mapping discursive structures and formation, it is possible to narrow the question to an examination of religious affiliation in the USA and Australia, as a means of testing the efficacy and status of grand narratives in these two English-speaking, pluralistic, developed nations with dominant migration histories.1 

The tendentious post-modernist claim is that Western societies are increasingly secular and that they have abandoned grand narratives. The statistical evidence suggests that in a pluralistic, multicultural society such as Australia, it would be more accurate to say that parallelism involving grand narratives is actually on the increase as a direct result of immigration and other social changes. By comparison, and presumably for similar reasons, self-identifying religious affiliation in the USA is even higher than in Australia. Indeed, while there are significant historical and social similarities superficially at least between the two countries, other differences in community priorities for various ethnic and cultural groups make Australia and the USA in actuality profoundly dissimilar. For instance, around 28% of the US resident population is identified as Latino/Hispanic (44 million or 15%) or African American (38 million or 13%). Both these minority communities self-identify very strongly for religious affiliation at an average rate of 95%. In Australia, by contrast, the largest ethnic minorities (Greek, Italian and Lebanese for instance) share rough parity at around 1-2% respectively of the overall population. As in the USA, religious affiliation for these minorities is higher than for the general population, at around 90%. Nevertheless, the general principle applies, which is that the populations of both countries have, in the most recent censuses, only a small percentage of persons who could possibly be identified with tendentious post-modernism for its anti-grand narrative stance as indicated by non-religious affiliation.

The significance of this finding is that the post-modernist discourse, or at least, discourses which are hypothetically amenable to post-modernism’s rejection of traditional grand narratives, are only a minority in the overall aggregate of social discourses. The editor of The Economist, John

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1 They are identified as such in Holmes (2008).
2 19% of Australians in the 2006 census identified themselves as having no religious affiliation, while major religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism are growing through immigration, conversion and/or high birth rates. The conclusion is that grand narratives still attract 81% of the Australian population, and this statistic may actually be growing: Australian Bureau of Statistics Open Document 2914.0.55.002 – 2006.
3 Self-identifying for religious belief in the USA is closer to 90% (US Census: 2001-2006).
4 A brief scan of the minorities constituting the USA or Australia, together with the relative proximity of source countries for these minorities, indicates deep social differences between two English speaking countries.
6 Even so, while some meaningful links can be drawn between the USA and Australia demographically, there are other social differences that cannot be reconciled: the USA is dominated ethnically by two principal minority groups, whereas Australia has a broader distribution of minorities; and religious affiliaion is higher across all speech communities in the USA (Australian Bureau of Statistics Open Document 2914.0.55.002 – 2006)(US Census: 2001-2006).
Micklethwait, has published a study showing that the rise of religion in the wider US community has coincided with a move in the opposite direction by the academy. This is supported by other studies in the USA which have stressed that rather than an overall decline in religiosity, there has been an increase, which should more properly be considered as a “religious realignment...since 1965 (due to) a decline in the middle (combined with) immigration and denominational switching.” Another, Australian survey targeting the non-religious by “noted author and church historian (Dr.) John Dickinson” recently established that a strong awareness of and belief in Christian doctrines in Australia is running against presuppositions and assumed trends:

We are staggered. We thought the survey would show the profound scepticism of Australians. Instead it shows there is a base level assumption among the Australian public that accepts the Jesus story even if it has no relevance to their lives.

Indeed, some independent studies in post-colonialism itself confirm that the notion of a society converted to post-modernism is not only erroneous, but that it is increasingly out of date in the context of a rapidly changing, globalising, and spiritualising society, beyond Humanities, and beyond the academy in general. The lack of engagement with wider social reality by a significant section within the academy has been described as an academic discomfort with any challenge to “cherished” Marxist, secular post-modernism. It has also been described as a particularly North Atlantic or Eurocentric approach which is inappropriate in the global context. Moreover, as the wider academy moves to becoming a globalised and diverse community, its essential pluralism looks increasingly important for the multiple strands of discourse represented in international dialogue which compete with it historically and which often directly contradict its very discursive framework and constructionism.

Some features of this ‘globalising of the academy’ are: the persistence (even resurgence) of traditional ‘grand narrative’ or teleological ways of seeing; the development of a scholarship which counters post-colonialism (for instance) and which is dominated by commentators who are themselves from former colonies; and the increasing participation in and commentary dealing with life writing from beyond the supposedly “white, metropolitan” West. Even at the superficial level, it is evident that a lively and diverse academic debate is

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4. Zwartz (SMH, 7-4-2009:5); Dickinson (2009).
7. Kanth (2009); Connell (2007); Gran (1997): both areas of enquiry are indebted to post-colonialism.
rapidly growing on a global scale; and that this discussion rests on a substantial and uninterrupted tradition of scholarship. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this constantly evolving debate is testament to the value, utility and health of the Western academy in general. To become static ideologically is to withdraw from the debate. Indeed, as Bernstein has argued, there is a need to move beyond the “competing and shifting opinions (which) rush to embrace various forms of relativism (and positivism)” and to acknowledge a formal pluralism: “in a living conversation there is always unpredictability and novelty…the contours of the conversation have taken on a new and exciting shape”\(^1\). The main feature and intrinsic value of Western academic discourse, he argues, is in its:

> Appreciation of the depth and pervasiveness of conflict…which characterises our theoretical and practical lives…plurality does not mean that we are limited to being separate individuals with irreducible subjective interests. Rather it means that we seek to discover some common ground to reconcile differences through debate, conversation and dialogue\(^2\).

That is why it is so critical to assess the tendency to the exclusive which is at the heart of the tendentious post-modern academy. It is evident that the tendency to reductionism, positivism and exclusiveness is thus contrary to the (overall) spirit and tradition of the Western academy, even while it has many precedents\(^3\). That is, there has always been in the Western academy a tradition of open and scholastic enquiry, even undecidability, from which post-modernism itself is a natural product. These are the “three golden threads…rationalism, universalism and self-criticism”\(^4\). Indeed, it can be argued that to disallow common ground is to ignore a tenet of post-modernism in the idea of “contingency”\(^5\). The post-modern academy should, by definition, definition, allow, even ‘co-canonise’ academic dialogue oppositional to post-modernism itself.

The default setting of the tendentious post-modernist academy, by contrast, in its privileging of a canon of texts and literature, is a form of positivism. The danger of narrowing an interpretive frame, by advancing the merits of an insular post-modernist view, to the exclusion of other potential frames, is that it closes off debate. It disengages with both the wider community and with the balance of the academy. In not presenting alternative views, the tendentious post-modernist academy becomes a unitary voice. At the same time as the wider academy engages with a multiplicity of voices and with social diversity on a global scale, a very influential sector of the academy dealing with life writing is actively seeking to become unrepresentative of praxis.

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1 Bernstein (1983:2-3).
3 The analytical work of Western (and non-Western) academics criticising the constructions in the literature are part of this constantly evolving dialogue. However, as Warraq argues, the self-contemplative and self-critical tradition is strongest in Western civilisation: Warraq (2007).
4 Warraq (2007:57): allowing the generic sense of universalism which is applicable in human rights, for instance.
5 Klages (2007); Lye (1999).
In becoming disengaged the tendentious post-modernist academy risks transforming itself into a negative gatekeeper role. On the one hand, it cannot fail to apply limited and limiting conceptual frameworks to the analysis of representation of self and others. On the other hand it risks a naturalisation of this ‘authoritative’ pronouncement as a political agenda which constructs hegemony:

> Even the injunction to attend to a variety of ‘differences’ can hardly avoid the universalistic cast of a general prescriptivism and no political agenda can avoid general normative assessments of the salience and weight of particular kinds of ‘differences’ (and) reified and essentialist pictures (which are) equally hegemonic representations.¹

An evident lack of engagement by the tendentious post-modernist academy is in its conscious eschewing of any text which overtly deals with religious belief². The external reality is that a growth in religious adherence globally, and especially a rise in fundamentalism, has enormous implications for the nature of, and study of, life writing. Yet the literature seems reluctant to engage with the topic³. By contrast, and in response to this shift in the dialogue, the sometimes critic of post-modernism, and frequently maverick critic of the academy⁴, Stanley Fish remarked that the future of academic enquiry was tied to, and needed to recognise the importance of, the rise of spiritualism:

> When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted to know what would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, class and gender as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion⁵.

Outside the tendentious post-modernist life writing academy, of course, the wider academy has kept up with social developments. For instance, an alternative theory, that of post-secularism⁶, has been advanced to suggest that secularism itself, as the foundation of post-modernism, is a normative European construct, and thus open to question on that basis. It acknowledges the counter movement of spiritualism as a wider discursive reaction against academic discourse imposition, as well as the ennui that has set in when the tendentious, systemic, institutional reactionary regime of truth itself becomes the establishment, particularly in education and state-sponsored cultural gateways⁷.

That is why the conclusion of a pan-discursive post-modernism is, regrettably, not a compliment to scholarship. It has a logic, of course, but it is the logic of a

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² Not detailed, but an inductive conclusion from the data summarised in Appendix B.
³ Hamilton refers to the religious proscription of biography in Islam contemporarily, for instance (2007: 45-49, 237, 292); while Jolly merely refers to historical religious life writing (2001: Islam, Hagiography etc).
⁵ Brown (2008), spelling retained.
⁶ Berger (1999); Jenkins (2006).
circular argument or its academic equivalent, a positivist construction contingent upon the operation of an especially opaque and obstructionist discursive framework acting as gatekeeper truth regime without the benefit of any empirical research. This self-generating, self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating construction is an expression of the “observer’s paradox”\(^1\). It then becomes naturalised as a real and perfectly rational normative system which is especially powerful since it is structural and institutionalised at the higher didactic level. Its opaqueness derives from being obscured by the façade of critical theory which purports to be systemically independent and free of constructionism itself. It is, in operation, a very sophisticated construction; although on reflection its treatment of dissenters can be seen as particularly ideological. It therefore exposes itself for what it is, an elitist, tendentious artificial construct.

**Elitism and democracy in biography**

Elitism, or the “specialisation and expertise in any knowledge area”, should be a good thing; except that it also connotes “snobbery, power and anti-democratic sentiment”\(^2\). As a feature of specialised expertise in the academy elitism most certainly has value, as I have indicated previously. This is especially true of elite discussion which engages with wider social praxis and which fosters pluralism. There is, however, a growing consciousness that the elitism of the tendentious academy is indeed esoteric and theoretical\(^3\) rather than practical, analytical and responsive to social practice\(^4\). One irony is that such commentators need to assert their “proletariat credentials” even while dissecting “high-bourgeois”\(^5\) texts and “anti-biographical”\(^6\) authors such as Barthes, Woolf, Strachey and Capote. This is, after all a profoundly anti-democratic impulse in rejecting popular life writing forms while privileging only those most amenable to the tendentious post-modernist ideology. There is also illogicality in claiming “progress” -via an anti-teleological theory which then becomes hegemonic- by replacing the “analytical methods of the recent past (and which is) committed to the dissolution of kingship while claiming its privileges, its supremacy and its institutional power”\(^7\). Indeed, Schlaeger sees the academic “dramatization of post-modernism as merely another attempt to stay in control via theory”\(^8\); while Carey views “the huge current readership for literary biography (as) working against the trend of English studies”\(^9\). This can be interpreted as indicating that the tendentious post-modernist academy is anti-democratic and anti-pluralist.

It seems that the tendentious academy is largely oblivious to its constructionism. Looking more closely at a sample of an academic utterance

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1 Holmes (2008:248).
2 *OED* (2009); Delbridge (2003).
8 In Batchelor (2003:63).
9 In Batchelor (2003:9).
on the subject, the linguistic-discursive features which obscure the intent and signification embedded within its propositional content can be isolated. For instance, the utterance: “predominantly white, metropolitan cultures of the Europeanised West”\(^1\) uses a deictic device which assumes that the interlocutor shares certain assumptions and background knowledge to complete the perlocutionary act seamlessly. The “Europeanised West” is apparently synonymous with white society, although Japan, post-industrial China, developing India and numerous other modern nations which have been ‘Europeanised’ are most certainly neither predominantly ‘white’ nor even necessarily metropolitan. “Predominantly white” as a cultural-racial determiner is entirely problematic: presumably this means Barack Obama is also predominantly white\(^2\). Even the label “metropolitan” is in conflict with the documented social reality of dominant sub-urbanisation\(^3\). It fails to recognise in its own creed that there exists:

> The plurality of cultures and the multiplicity of landscapes with which these cultures are associated (and it does not recognise) the value of popular culture both in its own terms and as an implicit challenge to dominant values (imposing) a unitary view of culture as the artistic and intellectual product of an elite\(^4\).

By contrast the premise that biography should be studied in a holistic manner\(^5\) acknowledges the uniqueness of life writing as social practice. This minority approach offers a responsive and descriptive analysis to “the entire field of real-life human depiction”\(^6\), opening up enquiry to a popular, democratic artefact as well as the academy product. Academic enquiry in this category seeks to describe rather than prescribe, and can more confidently be described as specialised knowledge informed by and responding to a social reality, rather than seeking to impose an external “narrow focus” or frame\(^7\). As part of this response, it seeks to identify different manifestations of life writing, looking for commonalities and differences behind the biographical impulse. It can be described as pro-democratic and pro-pluralistic, in that it foregrounds the popular basis of life writing as being the object of study; from which all other types of life writing are contextualised. For instance, Freadman notes the utterly democratic nature of the biographical impulse, where any and potentially every, life is accorded substance through the act of recording:

> Life writing addresses and gives voice to many social constituencies including women, indigenous groups, postcolonial societies, and ethnic groups. It gives voice to those who suffer illness, oppression,

\(^1\) Natoli & Hutcheon (1993:viii).
\(^2\) This question has been effectively settled, with Obama self-identifying as ‘African-American’ in the 2010 US Census: Avila (2010).
\(^3\) The problematic nature of ‘white’ as a racial/ethnic and/or cultural descriptor has been commented on elsewhere in the literature: Kameniar (2007:1-3); Brodkin (1999:8); Frankenburg (1993); Kincheloe & Steinberg (2000); Ware and Back (2002).
\(^4\) Jackson (1989:1).
\(^5\) Hamilton (2007:3-12).
\(^6\) Hamilton (2007:3).
\(^7\) Hamilton (2007:3).
misfortune, tragedy; but also to those who wish to speak in a spirit of affirmation, inquiry, amazement, even celebration\textsuperscript{1}.

There is a fundamental epistemological polarity then, between the dominant tendentious academy view and that of Jolly/Freadman/Hamilton. There are differences however which are significant, even among those who tend to the democratic view. For instance, Hamilton pursues the idea of democracy in life writing to conclude that the global popularity of contemporary life writing is tied directly to the experience of democracy in English-speaking Western nations as causative of and developed from the Christian, individualist tradition\textsuperscript{2}. The genealogical link from ancient to modern life writing is usually made via St Augustine’s *Confessions*\textsuperscript{3}. Hamilton however proposes a particularly Protestant Christian model of biography dominated by the “notion of self-hood and focus on the individual”\textsuperscript{4}. This tradition builds on a latent, common human human propensity across cultures, developing further the sense of individual from the Augustine innovation, before accommodating a secular humanist development in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Centuries\textsuperscript{5}. He notes the “laundered” nature in much of the early Christian tradition, as well as the stronger secular-humanist realism fostered in a post-Renaissance English-speaking democratic cultural environment\textsuperscript{6}.

The contextual significance of this academic polarity

There are two items of controversial significance in this assertion: the first is ideological and the second is a question of power and control. Hamilton is proposing a model of ideological primacy where biography as we know it could not have developed in any other ideological environment, because the individual and knowable self\textsuperscript{7} is not privileged to the extent that it has been in the English tradition. Additionally this life writing environment has developed an inclusiveness which accommodates conflicting secular and ideological viewpoints as part of that continuum of development:

Compared with the images of our culture which post-modernism projects, biography is, in spite of its intertextual construction, fundamentally reactionary, conservative, perpetually accommodating new models of man, new theories of the inner self, into a personality-oriented cultural mainstream, thus always helping to defuse their subversive potential\textsuperscript{8}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1} Freadman (2005). Jolly (2001) prefaces her work with a similar ‘global’ outlook.
\textsuperscript{2} Hamilton (2007:2,48-49).
\textsuperscript{3} Jolly (2001); Edel (1957)(1987); Freadman (2001).
\textsuperscript{4} Hamilton (2007:45).
\textsuperscript{5} Hamilton (2007:130-189).
\textsuperscript{6} Hamilton (2007:54-55,95).
\textsuperscript{7} Hamilton (2008:209-210). The self (or ‘will’) is also the focus in Freadman (2001) and is discussed in Jolly (2001).
\textsuperscript{8} Batchelor (2003: 2).
\end{footnotesize}
By contrast, the tendentious post-modernist academy (hereafter referred to as the TPMA) model excludes conflicting ideological positions and the autonomous self\(^1\):

One of the tenets of post-modernism is that selves are texts, and texts are not about reality but about other texts, that they are intertextually constituted...the position that personal experience has an authority of its own has become untenable\(^2\).

In recent decades psychoanalysis, structuralism and other modern or post-modern interpretive paradigms have asserted or implicitly assumed that there is no authenticity, or rather that authenticity is a culturally determined myth\(^3\).

This indicates the central incompatibility of the inclusive democratic generative and the TPMA anti-democratic models. Control over the discourse of life writing also seems to be reflected in these mutually exclusive discursive environments. The TPMA has actively sought to make out that it has accomplished a deserved place of primacy in the literature and in Western discourse. As educators controlling the learning and discursive environment it can be seen as a powerful exercise of influence and resources-capital, articulated as it is within a narrow racial-social-class locative band\(^4\).

Discursively, such an utterance could be argued as a factual presupposition, where this type of utterance entails that a wider discourse is operative as an entailment of the assertion. Such is the force of the hierarchically empowered and structurally embedded assertive that the interlocutor understands the utterance to mean that even if it is not entirely true, it should be: it is implicitly operative as a directive-imperative. This is facilitative, satisfying the felicity-gatekeeper conditions since the utterance is made by persons within the academy, a socially fore-grounded and prestigious speech community.

Indeed, it has been suggested that the homogenising trend in the TPMA is not only anti-democratic, but also stifling for alternative forms of life writing, especially popular biography and life writing which (overtly) validates generic integrity\(^5\). Resistance to the influence of the TPMA can be risky. Relevant to any discussion of ideology and control is the lively and highly politicised debate that has appeared in recent years in Australia over the role of academic power/bias in the allegations of “self censoring”\(^6\) by students who are reportedly intimidated into silence in tutorials and assessment tasks by the institutional force of academic ideological consensus. The allegations of an “intellectual monoculture”\(^7\) are often dismissed as tokens of “culture wars”\(^8\) at the same time as a demonstrably flawed consensus is asserted amongst

\(^1\) Eagleton (1991); Davidson (2006).
\(^3\) Batchelor (2003:59).
\(^6\) Alexander (2008).
\(^7\) Bendle (2009).
\(^8\) Trounson (2008).
students and academics\(^1\). Yet it is also accepted that: "If...students and staff are united on a collective view of (a particular subject) it does not paint a picture of a lively and diverse academic community"\(^2\). The significance socially of such an issue is demonstrated by the Senate enquiry conducted in 2008 which investigated allegations of left-wing/post-modernist bias at the tertiary level. Interestingly, the report's conclusions mirrored ideological orientations and returned a mixed result:

The Senate inquiry into academic freedom and bias has ended as it began with government members dismissing allegations of systemic left-wing bias at universities and schools, but with the minority coalition members deploring a biased "monoculture"\(^3\).

The results of this enquiry are entirely inconclusive. It also highlights the fact that for many in the TPMA, post-modernism itself has been hijacked as a form of mandated, grand narrative truth, while ostensibly avoiding any admission that it, in practice, fulfils the role of empirical research tool, rather than simply an alternative interpretative framework. Its role and origins in philosophy\(^4\) have therefore become obscured. It also seems that the largely metaphorical, even hyperbolic\(^5\) nature of the language systems it employs have become naturalised, in addition to the premise itself, such that they in turn have become fixed spatially and contextually, without any self-consciousness for the artifices-tropes upon which it is constructed.

This becomes even more apparent when considering the re-constructed nature of semiotic theory, which locates post-modernism temporally and from which it developed in the first place, philosophically and chronologically. There are two obvious problems in attributing theory to Saussure, which are, firstly that he never actually published his lectures or papers\(^6\), and also that he developed his own theories from others\(^7\). This tends to cast doubt over the unitary nature of TPMA theorising and application: it is naturalised while inherently a constructed mosaic of ideas. By restricting itself to finding and discussing only the literature which presents from a canonical perspective, such theory can be seen as selective for an ideological minority, unrepresentative of the diversity of the uptake of biography in the extended community of biographically active persons. The TPMA literature, by confining itself to the so-called and often self-identifying marginalised and minority discourses, sets itself up to make oppositional meaning, defining great

\(^{1}\) Tully (2009).
\(^{2}\) Anderson (2009).
\(^{3}\) Trounson (2008). Contrary to the media reports, the majority (Government) report was in the negative, while the minority report (Coalition) was dissenting and positive for the allegations. This indicates an entirely ideological interpretation of the data and an entirely quantifiably inconclusive (and predictable) result for the research question itself.
\(^{4}\) Freadman (2001); Jolly (2001).
\(^{5}\) Currie (1998:73-75).
\(^{6}\) His lectures were reconstituted from student notes and published posthumously in 1916: other versions have highlighted errors and interpolations: Saussure (1986:i-xii). His own manuscript, only discovered in 1996, showed even more discrepancies and complete contradictions between the reconstituted theories and his original ideas: Saussure (2006).
literature as purely that which subverts from the mainstream and traditional\(^1\). This is a derivative stance, reliant upon a critical view, or negative interpretation, of data, when clearly most life writing is productive and positive, cathartic, didactic, motivational, even inspirational\(^2\).

There seems to be a belief in the TPMA literature that by being critical of mainstream literature, by being subversive and derivative of existing texts, it remains ideologically liberating or construction-free. It would be more accurate to say that any text is representative of an ideology\(^3\), that it is produced and read precisely because of that formation, and that the TPMA is constitutive and normative for a contextually, socially narrow discourse. Its texts and its reading of texts are bound to this narrow ideology, as indicated by the TPMA assertion that apparently only other people have ideologies which prevent them from seeing things as they really are:

> Ideology is the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (it) signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them by their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole...people make their own ideology at the same time as ideology makes them subjects\(^4\).

Seeing the relationship between discourse and ideology in this way means that the language system of the TPMA can be applied to their own “meaning-making”, what Barthes labels the “important relationship between ideology and myth, or ideas-in-form...everything can be a myth (or) type of speech...provided it is conveyed by discourse”\(^5\). This indicates that the TPMA TPMA has indulged in its own mythologising in its treatment of life writing. Part of this mythologising is the accusation of “imperialism”\(^6\), which is a barrier barrier to any discussion of Hamilton’s proposed Anglo biographical tradition.

**The Anglosphere as an explanation for the development and expanding appeal of life writing across speech communities:**

The central ideological problem with Hamilton’s foregrounding or privileging of the Anglo tradition is traceable to what Bloom calls the “school of resentment”\(^7\). It has become fashionable to impose a cultural relativism as one legacy of contemporary theory\(^8\), and this has tended to a blanket charge of imperialist paternalism for the cultural expressions of the UK and the USA\(^9\). USA\(^9\). Needless to say, the irony of an anti-Western tradition emanating from the Western academy itself can be termed as merely yet another imperialist product.

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\(^2\) Freadman (2005).

\(^3\) Using Eagleton’s definition (1976:16-17).


\(^5\) Barthes (1972:105-107).

\(^6\) Barthes (1972:157).

\(^7\) Bloom (1994:18).

\(^8\) Jackson (1989:x-xiii; 1-5).

\(^9\) Jackson (1989:x-xiii; 1-5).
Yet the precedence for biographical traditions both as a mainstream and a personal social activity in English-speaking nations cannot be ignored: there is certainly enough evidence to support this conclusion. Whether or not it is causative or merely co-incident/existent, is a conclusion derived from ideological formation. The problem seems to be in the inevitability of a cultural value judgment, when it is also possible to view biography’s preferential treatment in English-speaking societies as merely a product of felicitous conditions for that development. The generative social mechanism for this development is more significant for this enquiry, although it also needs to be evaluated contextually to demonstrate its uniqueness. This discussion of biography’s prominence in English-speaking communities such as the USA, the UK and Australia is contingent upon certain principles and assumptions. These are: that biography as articulated contemporarily, has been measured as being more foregrounded informally than formally at the popular discursive level; that an elite TPMA discursive construction seeks to reverse the naturally occurring reality and to naturalise this artificial construct; that biography has been assessed as being more popular in English-speaking societies; that English is the language of biographical expression across speech domains in these communities; that life writing can be seen as a truly democratic medium of access and expression; that biography as it is understood in a modern democratic, individualist and pluralistic society in these English-speaking societies enjoys a largely popular and uninterrupted tradition for at least 3 centuries; and lastly, that this manifestation of biography can be explained as as a cultural artefact constituted and expressed as a product of discursive and ideological development which in turn is based on a basic motivating human socialising, sub-ideological need.

Some assumptions can be made for the link between a continuous biographical tradition, strong community life writing participation and cultural-linguistic specificity. The first is that the literature for biography as contemporarily articulated, first appeared in English, by which it obtained its pre-eminent role and can be seen as representative of much greater participation in English-speaking communities beyond the academy. Even Lejeune, who enjoyed a foundational position in the literature only after being translated into English, commented on the primacy of biography as essentially culturally specific to Anglo society. He can also be seen as being reliant upon upon the Anglo tradition, given that his stance agrees with the pre-eminent English-speaking commentators favouring a positivist position, and it ran counter to, and attracted great hostility from, his TPMA French contemporaries, who were from the 1960s aggressively writing against the generic understanding of life writing as articulated in the Anglo-US literature. More recently, comments at the 2008 IABA Hawaii conference by non-native English-speaking academics evidenced the primacy and advanced development both in theory and in research, of the English language literature.

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and academy, which forms the basis of their own, derivative research. Chinese scholars, in particular, attending for the first time remarked on the recent-ness of their research and its genetic reliance upon the English-speaking academy:

Chinese biography changed little in the some 2,000 years after it first appeared in China...after some Chinese scholars introduced concepts and writing methodologies of western biography into China...in the past 10 years Chinese biography has undergone dramatic changes.

This is true even for the researchers publishing and presenting in languages other than English, so the substance is increasingly translatable and culturally-academically international rather than being embedded in purely language-specific frames. This indicates, that despite its translatability (and perhaps even because of its tributary, secondary nature), there still exists a foundational requirement of English-language literacy and cultural literacy, since as has been demonstrated; most production of biography is tied to that language, either by primary production or by referentiality. The forefront and bulk, of academic literature continues to be produced in English, regardless of the translation direction, and by all indications, while there is demonstrably a cultural export-ability in the English-language biographical text, this market and cultural dominance is exponentially growing at the same time that it is internationalising. Like the English language itself, life writing’s growth and exportability is closely tied to economic, geographical, technological and cultural dominance.

Notwithstanding this general applicability, there is, theoretically at least, some exclusion in any general cultural artefact for the range of speech communities spread across any pluralistic English-language dominated society, since a discussion of the uptake or accessibility of life writing also contains the hidden assumption that biographical texts and even biographical analysis-enquiry as a practice, are referenced to English language competence and textual-cultural familiarity and literacy. Indeed, even this conclusion by itself represents another vastly unexplored area of enquiry which is not investigated to any degree in the literature.

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1 Hawaii (2008).
5 The pre-eminent life writing association (IABA) publishes and conducts proceedings predominantly in English, while the major journals and university courses are produced by institutions on the USA, Australia and the UK.
6 This is a common caveat in research in Australia, as “the Australian-born are more likely to be interviewed for a survey”. This pre-supposes English language literacy and “cultural bias” which can be re-badged as cultural literacy and integration: Cummins (2006:9-18); Cummins (2009).
7 A few journal articles in recent years have concentrated on the ‘external’ life writing, some of which are left untranslated, others are translated, but they are isolated and indicate a selective uptake overall. It is to be hoped that this author can pursue this line of enquiry in future research.
A troubling detail here also, is the possibility that life writing exists to some extent ubiquitously beyond the measurements indicated previously, but that it is hidden in media and functionality which are not immediately recognisable, such as oral literature, folklore and other extra-literary textual traditions. This can be reconciled with the fact that the English-language tradition represents a highly complex, codified or stylised, developed form of life writing which potentially renders and codifies all other forms of life writing in media within which they become accessible to the wider audience-community. That is, the systematic set of life writing codes contained within the English-language biographical tradition, with its potential for inclusiveness, facilitates communication in a way that no other semiotic system can, and this explains its appeal across the social spectrum. Note the increasing interest in the literature for multi media formats which offer a continuity and instantaneousness as well as the benefits of recorded text, image and sound, with interactive facilities, for which parallels can be made with these traditional, transitory, ephemeral media.

Again, while there is no research as yet which conclusively demonstrates the spread of life writing participation across speech communities, particularly where ethnic difference-identity is significant, it is important to note that the social and linguistic facility does exist within these communities for this to occur. This facility consists of: a socially privileged life writing tradition; the accessibility of media; a dominant and inclusive policy of pluralism, which includes officially endorsed polyglossia and a social reality of heteroglossia within which English literacy and cultural literacy are socially aspirational traits. This further evidences the translatability of the life writing tradition such that while it is reliant upon English language contexts for its high level development, it is certainly potentially mutable and adaptable to social need and context. This transmutability cannot be underestimated. When considering the nature of “cultural nations” within an English-speaking community as another useful descriptor for cultural-discursive identity and formation, the apparently benign nature of life writing as a cultural artefact, which may very well be alien to the community’s discursive background, is reportedly taken up with enthusiasm by displaced persons.

Similarly, recent high profile publishing successes indicate that there does appear to be some linkage for continuity across speech community for author

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1 Jolly recognises that despite the immateriality of oral literature it certainly qualifies as life writing, but by definition it remains outside the scope of the literature. Examples are Maori genealogies and Australian Aboriginal Dreamings: Jolly (2001).

2 The syntactical, pragmatic and lexical qualities of the English language itself provide the facility for borrowings and a readiness for absorption: Crystal (1995:134). This foundational semiotics has been suggested for a genetic tradition where uptake of diverse literary forms is facilitated as well: Holmes (2008:235); Singh (2008).


7 As operative within the diglossic reality: Holmes (2008).


9 The holocaust-writing tradition for instance, is absent in Germany, but a powerful discourse in the US, Australia and the UK: Jolly (2001).
and biographical subject as indicated by best seller lists\(^1\). For instance after his successful presidential campaign Barack Obama remains the subject of best-selling biographical works\(^2\). Additionally, it was reported recently that Obama’s personal income deriving from his biographies is significantly greater than all his other sources of income put together, including his political wage\(^3\). This US example can be construed as indicating social preference within a nationally linked continuum of disparate discourses, since the subjects of biographies are being drawn from, and indicate appeal, across the spectrum of ethnicities and cultural groups\(^4\). It is to be expected that in a community such as the USA where ethnically Anglo readers predominate, the majority of biographical subjects are also drawn from the Anglo ethnicity. However this does not seem to be the case in the case of many texts which have been popular in the US market. More longitudinal research is required in this area to determine whether the subjects represented in commercial biographical success indicate a sustained, greater multicultural participation in biography or simply a casual curiosity from publishers and the mainstream readership for the ‘exotic’. It is likely that the uptake is in both directions: as migrant communities obtain a place in the wider community they integrate with social norms regarding biography’s positive status and they also supply subjects for the wider community’s appetite of new and interesting material.

On the other hand, the reality of English-speaking life writing is far more complex, and despite the agendas imposed on it or with which it is promoted and produced, it seems that overall, biographical texts elude narrow ideological controls. For instance, there is the extreme difficulty the TPMA experiences with an autobiography such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s *Infidel*\(^5\), where she presents as an atheistic, displaced, African, ex-Muslim feminist. All of these descriptors represent categories amenable to specific ideological treatments, but the author also speaks out stridently against post-modernism, post-colonialism, and relativist tendencies as new forms of Euro-centric paternalism\(^6\). In practice, therefore, Ali as a biographical text presents a discursive dilemma, especially if it is read as a complex, contradictory, holistic text:

> Viewed with suspicion by some on the progressive Left and with outright condemnation by others, Ali has been prepared to attack ideas and people that the Left has treated as sacrosanct: Islam as a religion, Muslim men (as the oppressors of Muslim women), and multiculturalism and its postmodern handmaiden, moral equivalence,

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\(^2\) Amazon.com (2008).

\(^3\) This is interesting given that some of these texts date back to 1995. The figures for 2007 reveal that he earned up to 3.9 million USD from sales of his books, out of the total of 4.2 million USD Obama combined household income: Zeleny (2008).

\(^4\) The internationality of Obama’s appeal can be considered as contingent upon mixed ethnicity and nationality (Kenyan-American/African-Caucasian) as well as his schooling in Indonesia, his split family relationships, and his minority status. The appeal (or not) to Americans has more to do with US race relations and history. These are all features prominent in the media and academic attention his biography attracts.


which postulates that all cultures and all religions are equally deserving of respect, support and government funding.

In the light of this criticism, then, it is interesting (and evidentiary) to see the Ali text omitted from the TPMA canon, when the biography has been commercially very successful in the US market. It is evident by contrast, that the wider US life writing readership is receptive and culturally literate: the success of the Obama and Ali texts point to a much greater, cross-social readership for such a text while the TPMA is resistant to its canonical inclusion. It is also evident that the wider academic community does not experience the same difficulty in appreciating the voices that Ali presents, even when these angles are oppositional to much current theory. She has, for instance been recognised for "numerous human rights awards...and named one of Time magazine’s 100 Most Influential People of 2005". Indeed, as a text she should have direct application in southern theory, Eurocentric theory and other theories of post-colonialism, where the constructedness of the traditional “North Atlantic academy” is interrogated. Ali as a text and a commentator can be seen as validating the concept of openness to voices from beyond the traditional Western academy, and she should be seen as extending the post-Saidist dialogue in significant, new directions.

When read along with other commentators from outside this academy, including many from (formerly) “dominated or colonised societies”, Ali offers an alternative reading of the Western academy on the basis of scholarship which challenges constructions built on constructions. The debate need not be decided in any definitive sense for it to be relevant. Suffice it to be said that the debate over Western constructionism is alive and well, and that, significantly many of the past and present “defenders of the West” are from former colonised states, along with many of the West’s most strident academic critics. In essence, the Western academy supports (even promotes) a dialogue between critics and supporters of itself. Said, Rushdie, Warraq, Nandy, Bayoumi, Chaudhuri, Ali and many other influential commentators figure prominently in the very discourse they interrogate; regardless of their construction as ‘outsiders’. Evidentially, this measure of support for, and criticism of, the West typically includes biographical material which could only be published via the English-speaking, Western academy, and it is this which evidences the power of the Anglo sphere for the inclusiveness of the life writing tradition.

The notion of a pre-eminent Anglo tradition for life writing defined

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2. Appendix B.
9. Warraq (2007) offers a comprehensive list of these commentators.
The notion of an Anglosphere has been advanced to explain the distinctive nature of English-speaking cultural artefacts, and it can be tested for application in biographical texts. That is, the conditions found in these societies are ideal for the growth of personal expression through individualistic life writing when they combine a facilitative “common language...high literacy...Common law-based...continuous democratic tradition...fostering constant progress towards greater civic freedoms...genuine humanitarianism...a particularly strong and independent civil society; openness and receptivity to the world, its people, and ideas; and a dynamic economy (etc)”\(^2\). The Anglosphere has been described as a “loose coalition based on a common language and heritage-traits common to America and other English-speaking nations (which) have uniquely positioned them to prosper in a time of dramatic technological and scientific change”\(^3\). Certainly it appears more than coincidental that life writing in its most developed, sophisticated, diverse and complex forms is emblematic of the traditions, including the prioritisation of individualism associated with these English-speaking nations\(^4\). The uptake of biography is clearly linked to the well- and long-established tradition of individualism. It is “anchored in a particular individualist approach to the self”\(^5\). It is logical then that the multiplicity of communities found within Anglosphere societies arguably have a high take up of life writing overall, as compared to other communities outside these macro-societies.

The differences between the highly developed forms of life writing in English-speaking communities and the delayed, recent or non-existent comparable biographical development elsewhere around the world can be highlighted by briefly comparing the literature for the British tradition and the experience of other societies where biography is not as prominent. It is critical at this point to remember that ultimately we do not know with any precision what is happening with the consumption and production of life writing outside of the areas where statistical information exists, since data is limited to where AC Nielsen-Bookscan is active\(^6\). It is suggested, however (as AC Nielsen has just just commenced collecting data in the European Union for book sales in the last 24 months, and this includes biographical categories), as a preliminary finding, that enough evidence already exists to conclude that biographical category sales are proportionately, and markedly so, lower in other languages in the continental European book markets, than in the UK market\(^7\). Although the trend needs mapping over several years, it is accepted with some credibility that biography buying in general is higher in English-speaking countries than anywhere else.

\(^1\) Bennett (2007); Hamilton (2007).
\(^3\) Bennett explicitly connects pluralism with cultural nations, such that the success of the Anglosphere is actually due to a cultural openness to others and difference. Similarly the entirely uneven distribution of post-colonial experiences, which are rarely racially based, are discussed at length: Bennett (2007:47-8).
\(^7\) A C Nielsen (2008).
To say that biography production and consumption is more popular and developed in English-speaking communities is helpful for contextualising the practice and suggesting cultural prioritising. There are two conclusions to be made from this: the first is that biography remains less of a cultural priority in countries other than, in particular, the UK, the USA and Australia. It is clear that biographical participation on the basis of cultural links (USA, UK and Australia) is a stronger unitary force than physical proximity. The second conclusion is that the cultural resistance to, or cultural receptivity for, biography, might possibly be linked to, respectively, historical usages of life writing specific to certain types of speech community and in some cases, the abuses of life writing by cultural or political elites. The European 20th Century experience with totalitarianism provides a useful test for this theory, but the topic is applicable to the global experience of variegated uptake and expressions of life writing.

**Biography as discrete cultural artefacts signifying dissimilar discursive constructions- individualism prioritised**

Looking outside English-speaking countries for any evidence of this generalised analysis, it has been remarked for instance, that biography has little or no post-war currency in Germany, a condition dictated very much by the cultural experience of “the belated nation syndrome…the philosophical tradition [and the] misappropriation of hero-worship by the Nazis”\(^1\). This contrasts directly with the English experience which is described as “a personality-centred culture [reliant on] empiricism, national identity, historical continuity and cultural centrism”\(^2\). It is further declared that biography, while a major genre for the English-speaking world, is merely a sub-genre of historical writing in Germany: this certifies that such generic appellation and development is “symptomatic of a much broader cultural phenomenon”\(^3\). It has even been remarked, in rather a derogatory way that: “there would seem to be no end to the peculiar English mania for the Individual Life”\(^4\).

By way of confirmation, there certainly does seem to be a distinctive emphasis, perhaps even an obsessive interest in personal details found in much current English-language biography:

> In Western multicultural societies embracing new technologies…humanizing portraiture to an extent inconceivable a century before…reality (has) become almost surreal: even the penis of the president of the United States could be a matter of public curiosity and living history\(^5\).

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\(^1\) Batchelor (2003:57).
\(^2\) Batchelor (2003:64-5).
\(^3\) Batchelor (2003:63).
\(^4\) Batchelor (2003:1).
\(^5\) Hamilton (2007:237-8). The reference is of course to Bill Clinton.
By contrast, an English-language biographer criticises what he sees as a fundamentally restrictive Germanic element of "anti-individualism" in biography generally, but especially in literary biography:

I abhor the Germanic temptation for the biographer to confuse...biography with literary criticism...it is the reader that counts in Anglo-American literary biography: not the author...biography (is) the test of a nation's ability to look at itself with honesty and balance.

A useful comparison can be made here with the Italian experience, as it is a culture transformed over the last 50 years by Fascism and an unstable post-war political history. Recent scandals over the alleged megalomania of its Prime Minister, Berlusconi, who dominates ownership of the media, centre on his desire to control and manipulate public discussion of his biography and relationships with a critical domestic media. Reportedly Berlusconi "who controls most of Italy's (media) networks...was hinting at using his political and financial powers to pressure editors." It is certain that a discursive construction unique to the Italian people has come into conflict with notions of democracy, media independence and biography extraneous to Italy and more recognisably Anglo-centric.

Lejeune, writing from the French perspective, agrees that the Anglo tradition is at variance with the historical and contemporary Gallic attitude to biography, from Sartre to Rousseau to Barthes. He comments that there has been a subtle shift in the French attitude in recent years, but concedes that this is probably influenced by US and British cultural imports. A dichotomy exists therefore, between the popular-informed Anglo tradition of biography, and the typically French, post-modernist-informed elite tendentious literature which is dismissive of the popular forms of biography.

This appears to vindicate the idea that English-speaking societies, despite their internal differences or pluralism, and overall variance from the literature, do seem to share a cultural or discursive paradigm. Individualism has been suggested as the major source and location of this cultural uniqueness. Returning to the more complex explanation which links the social privileging of biography as a cultural product to the Anglosphere, it could just as easily be argued that the fundamental link behind the prominence of life writing as a cultural discourse and product in the UK, USA and Australia, is that these countries are English-speaking, politically stable and historically enduring as wealthy democratic societies. However, the tendencies to reductionist

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2 The frequent description of Italy as the only country to have had more political leaders than post-war years, is an indication of its political instability and lack of democratic tradition: Encyclopaedia Britannica (2008).
3 Hooper (7-4-2009).
7 Hamilton (2007); Freadman (2001); Walter (2006:2-3).
8 Eagleton (1976).
explanations along the lines of capital and bourgeoisie leisure\(^1\) are also inadequate and constitute discursive impositions, since middle class capital is no guarantee of a life writing tradition. Life writing is largely absent, for instance in the stable, wealthy societies of northern Europe\(^2\). Therefore, the Anglo tradition of biography is only explainable by reference to distinctive discursive traits and continuity rather than environment or conditioning or bare concepts of capital.

At its most semantic and denotational lexical level, biography is understood as “the life of an individual recorded”\(^3\). Pragmatically and connotatively the Anglo biographical tradition is most certainly tied inextricably to social conditions of individualist prioritising, such as agency, control over the depiction of one’s own life, or one’s relationship to others as an autonomous\(^4\) individual. It is therefore representative of a world-view alien, for instance to the collectivism of totalitarian states and communities\(^5\). Perhaps most importantly, the individualist tradition is linked to prominent and distinctive notions of self-hood, where:

The self functions as an individualised, orienting, mediating, interpretive framework giving shape…it is the entire person considered from particular points of view, and it is the ways in which the person is made meaningful or given significance\(^6\).

There are precedents for the Anglo life writing tradition. Chroniclers of biography have connected the relatively brief, late, recognisably humanist social developments in ancient Greece and Rome to the rise of sophisticated, individualist and secularist-humanist life writing\(^7\). Bennett asserts that biographically stimulatory conditions arose long before the Renaissance\(^8\) and a link can be made to the structural power, oral literature and cultural practices of the ancient Britons, Angles and Saxons\(^9\). Together these factors are influential, but the unique catalyst for such a powerful combination is presumably the strength of democratic and capital empowerment across all classes: a distinctive feature of modern English-speaking societies\(^10\). It makes sense to link economic capital\(^11\) with social capital\(^12\) (or the inherent resources and valuing of self), as an explanation for what seems to be a unique expression of individualism through participation in life writing.

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\(^1\) Eagleton (1976).
\(^3\) OED (2009).
\(^4\) The Christian (sometimes labelled Judaeo-Christian) and post-Cartesian model of autonomy is integral to understanding the construction of self: Freadman (2001); Eagleton (1976).
\(^6\) Parrott (2000:120).
\(^7\) Hamilton (2007) links the eventual Anglo rise of biography to the Christian gospel writers in their individualist tendencies, derivative as they are from the Hellenistic tradition.
\(^8\) Bennett (2007).
\(^9\) Crystal (2009:30-36).
\(^10\) Bennett (2007); Hamilton (2007).
\(^12\) Stone (2001:8-13).
Migration as a site of biographical conflict

Indeed, another, perhaps unpredictable specific event seems to be in the very mixture of cultural nations and distinct speech communities such as those occurring in English-speaking countries reliant upon immigration. This collision of discrete discursive formations\(^1\) seems to have precipitated the added resurgence of life writing in recent decades, if the depth of migrant biography, including that of refugees and displaced persons is taken into account\(^2\). It can also be considered that the cultural reach and material power of the English language\(^3\) in the context of cultural imperialism is convincing as as a vehicle for the production of biography. However it can be reliably suggested that multiculturalism has actually been a contributing factor, reinvigorating for the development of biography, rather than culturally retardant. Indeed, the movement of persons from repressive societies into English-speaking societies where a powerfully individualistic biographical tradition is pre-existing seems to be both a spark for, and a response to, personal expression through life writing. For example the prominence of Holocaust survivor writing\(^4\) which originated and which has been developed most dramatically in the United States, is in stark contrast to the relative silence of Holocaust survivors in Israel or post-war Europe\(^5\). It is certainly a pattern that mirrors the post-war migration patterns to these English-speaking communities where a generic consensus for what biography signifies already exists, and where the uptake of life writing as a medium for the recording of migrant experience becomes valued as a cultural artefact. It is clear that migrants take up the previously unfamiliar Anglosphere life writing form, even though it is not part of their formative discourse.

It is not immediately clear how this discursive gap is bridged, given the potential conflict in the meeting of these imported cultural differences as manifested in a completely different, sometimes opposite practice and understanding of what biography signifies in the destination societies. As with any linguistic transaction-production, biography is manifested differently according to its discursive background: “Each...embodies a mode of social interaction characteristic of a particular culture”\(^6\). This provides evidence for the view that such generic understanding and prioritisation are indeed cultural products. Logically then, as a cultural product, it is to be expected that there are specific norms and cultural expectations for biography as produced in different cultural traditions: “The history (and discourse) of a nation is best told through the lives of its people...who represent different aspects of the societies and eras in which they lived”\(^7\).

\(^1\) Fairclough (1995:27).
\(^2\) Jolly (2001) devotes several major sections to the development of these categories of biography: Holocaust writing, displacement, survivor, trauma (etc).
\(^3\) Bragg (2007); Singh (2008); Crystal (1995)(2009).
\(^4\) Holocaust survivor writing is so prominent that it has been categorised as a distinct genre within autobiography: Jolly (2001)
\(^5\) Jolly (2001).
\(^6\) Wierzbicka (1991:165)
\(^7\) Zhuozhi (1994:3).
Nevertheless, it is evident that a unitary convergence does occur, where the discursive gap narrows as the migrant relinquishes a native discourse deterministic for forms of biography, in favour of that of the adopted community. It evidences that there exists a latent, ubiquitous common human aptitude for the uptake of such an inclusive medium of personal expression. The reason seems to be, apart from the need for individualistic identity, that felicitous conditions exist for diverse, even contradictory representations of ideological expression and formation. The attraction of a medium which foregrounds self, appeals to the basic human needs of identity, self-awareness and social place with which the narrative makes personal and contextual meaning. Yet to consider these needs or latent aptitudes as mere ideological constructions is unsatisfying, however attractive these unitary explanations may be to the TPMA need to consolidate experience into social conformation. The inclusive pluralistic multiplicity and highly developed codification of the Anglo biographical tradition seems to indicate, that like the ubiquitous human biographical impulse which transcends ideology, life writing itself as a human practice, although manifesting in various ideological agendas and forms, is itself sub-ideological.

**Biography as motivated by a sub-ideological impulse**

The junction of DA with various behavioural sciences has linked linguistic behaviour to central human needs which are beneath or which pre-exist ideology. I propose the concept of sub-ideology as a reference to the notion of common human needs, including the socialising impulse and the hard-wired capacity for language acquisition and communication. It suggests constancy and pre-constructedness: sub-ideology is innate, it informs learned behaviours and is in turn built upon and manipulated by culture and ideological processes to perform and fulfil discursive agendas or “enhanced reflexivity”. Sub-ideology, therefore, comes before discourse in constitutive human psychology, and informs motives; it is not enacted but it is acted upon. Included in this range of motivating behaviours, is the central need for socialising, where communication operates for curiosity, phatic connections and the establishing of relationships. The sub-ideological impulse is related to ideas of Maslow’s basic human needs for “validation, self-esteem, acceptance, self-actualisation and respect from others”. Indeed, psychological health is usually contingent upon “self-determination goals realised through satisfying of these innate psychological needs” especially in “reciprocal relationships”. The same principle of innate human social need in the exchange of personal information is a common conclusion:

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1 Jolly (2001).
2 Malinowski (1923).
5 Malinowski (1923).
7 Deci & Ryan (2000:227-233);
Anthropologists and evolutionary psychologists tell us that gossiping is not only a very human activity but is perhaps central to social relationships. At whatever level, at the family, in the workplace, or the broader community, we require and seek information about other people in order to adjust our relationships with each other\(^1\).

It is a curious fact that our much vaunted capacity for language seems to be mainly used for exchanging information on social matters...language makes us members of a community, providing us with the opportunity to share knowledge and experience in a way no other species can\(^2\).

Biography, as a highly codified product of language, should be traced to its seminal communicative roots and phatic-emotional-psychological human needs, which ideology obscures, rather than illuminates. This idea of elements resurfacing from the substratum\(^3\) of a linguistic transaction/genre to reconstitute the original impulse for the genre itself as a fundamental human response has not been considered in the literature. It is interesting, therefore, to revisit Jolly’s observation of biography as an ancient and ubiquitous practice, a comment which should be recast as being accurate but incomplete. The additional insight gained from an interdisciplinary approach yields the perspective that biography is the product of central human psychological and social needs, which are only obscured by ideological formations. Biography is, rather simply, motivated by the desire to socialise, but it is filtered through the operation of ideology as it is codified and then stylised from experience, memory and oral exchange. This explains the immense, potential and actual, diversity of biography as represented in the contemporarily open, pluralistic, inclusive and highly developed biographical tradition found in English-speaking societies.

The mutual exclusivity of ideological constructions: totalitarianism and the academy together in the one associative clause

Having established the premise of an Anglo tradition in biography which engages openly with multiple discourses, including those which are oppositional to itself, and which can be seen as fulfilling to a high degree the sub-ideological needs common to humanity, it can be asserted that this discursive environment, while accommodative for other discourses, does not enjoy a reciprocal arrangement with some of these discursive frameworks. Indeed, such is the level of the hostility between these ideological positions and usages of biography, that they must be seen as incompatible. Contextually, the struggle over the control of biography should be seen as merely another expression of ideology. There is indeed, a “regime of truth”

\(^{1}\) Hachten (2001:xix).
\(^{3}\) This metaphorical reference can be usefully linked with the Linguistics usage, where a substratum in language (or genre) can be found in traces as its imperative forces an upward pressure. In this case, the social discourse both informs and is informed by genre. Crystal (1994:332-333)
operative in the hegemonic nature of current TPMA ideological control: “sets of understandings which legitimate particular social attitudes and practices”\(^1\). That is not to suggest that the Anglosphere is not a discursive construction dominated by ideology like any other, but that it is unique amongst ideological social frameworks in that it allows, encourages and includes dissenting voices and ideologies.

By contrast, there were, for instance, recent incidents reported in the media, where comments were made publicly by Australians in Kuwait and Thailand which were considered derogatory to the “dignity” of the ruling elites. These incidents attracted media attention in Australia for the trivial nature of the comments, where these comments would not have attracted legal consideration for defamation-libel\(^2\). It is apparent that these Australians are accustomed to a national discourse where a high degree of tolerance exists for representation of elites. Indeed, Thailand which has a reputation as a stable, prosperous constitutional monarchy\(^3\), exhibits a cultural dualism: it tolerates life writing and media openness for celebrities and lower political figures, but exempts the monarchy and junta from any public discussion and criticism under “lese-majeste laws”\(^4\). A more recent incident involving comments from a dual British-Thai citizen working as an academic in Thailand, who was raised and educated in the UK, and who was forced to flee the country after being reported for criticism of the Thai royal family, demonstrates quite clearly the complete intolerance of negative representation involving culturally protected elites:

> It is clear that the charge is really about preventing any discussion about the relationship between the military junta and the monarchy...this is in order to protect the military’s sole claim to legitimacy: that it acted in the interests of the monarchy...Thailand is creeping towards totalitarianism\(^5\).

The contrast with media, political, public and academic scrutiny of the British royal family could not be more complete\(^6\). Perhaps it is the legacy of Strachey, and/or perhaps Strachey could only have operated in the Anglosphere. It is evident, therefore that the British, and by extension Anglosphere experience of life writing does not migrate especially well to cultures where biography is more narrowly defined by ideology.

Conversely, it is apparent that there are contemporarily, and diachronically, many discursive systems intolerant of any life representation which differs from that officially sanctioned by social gatekeepers. Ancient systems for recording lives tended to the hagiographic, elitist, patriarchal, monumental,

\(^1\) Foucault, as quoted in: Jaworski & Coupland (2004:132).
\(^2\) The clearest discursive reference is in terming the concept of being imprisoned for “insulting the monarchy” as “medieval”. The Australian ‘writer’ involved was freed under royal pardon, a significant face-saving gesture (smh.com.au:2009).
\(^3\) The Guardian (18-2-2009).
\(^4\) The Guardian (23-1-2009).
\(^6\) Note the intense coverage, for instance, most recently of Prince Harry’s racist comments as reported globally, but especially in the UK media: BBC News (2009).
didactic and mythologising\textsuperscript{1}. According to Jolly, the steles of ancient Egypt or Babylon, the official records of Rome, the Dreaming of the Australian Aboriginals, or any other system of instituting lore through the recording of lives, are examples of life writing which ignored the whole person, providing instead a narrative which was unitary, abbreviated, exclusive, stilted and narrowly ideological: “Biographies have been important as genealogical, religious and didactic forms since the start of recorded literature\textsuperscript{2}. Biography has been historically an official form of retelling the past and is therefore linked to the blatant efforts of elites to commemorate themselves: “the origins of biography are to be found in the early accounts of monarchs and heroes”\textsuperscript{3}. Allowing that such summations may miss nuances of culture embedded in the narrative which are explicitly representative of both the whole person and aspects of personality, it is, nevertheless, not uncommon to find biography where the overt premise overshadows the tale itself. In such cases, the idiosyncrasies of the subject may well survive the cultural uses of the narrative (or be useful for a didactic purpose), but they are subservient to the normative frame. This highly effective use of life narrative is still current.

More recently, the Soviet Union of Stalin or Maoist China provide examples of societies where deterministic traditions of life writing are at the service of regimes and officially sanctioned ideologies\textsuperscript{4}. One reason for the lack of a tradition of popular life writing\textsuperscript{5} in repressive regimes is because it has been appropriated, like many other social programs, as a function of the state\textsuperscript{6}. The suppression of life writing as a form of human expression in many such communities across the world is a result of the experienced history of abuse and misappropriation of this most democratic of human discourses by the powerful, and this has led to the consequent associations it has acquired for fear, myth-making and propaganda\textsuperscript{7}.

By contrast, the open tradition in 20\textsuperscript{th} century English-speaking society increasingly allowed and even sponsored-subsidised life writing oppositional to itself. Criticism of leadership past and present, led by the fourth estate\textsuperscript{8}, despite the often mythologised politics of McCarthy-ism\textsuperscript{9}, has never been seriously under threat in the Anglosphere. The proportionality is often exaggerated. It could be argued that openly critical systems as found in the academy, as an artificial existence and construct, are subsidised, sponsored and actively encouraged, by the very power structure they criticise. For

\textsuperscript{1} Jolly (2001); Hamilton (2007).
\textsuperscript{2} Jolly (2001:ix).
\textsuperscript{3} Cuddon (1998:83).
\textsuperscript{4} Jolly (2001:123).
\textsuperscript{5} This refers to recognisably overt life writing. Obviously traditions exist but they are informal and therefore covert, such as family writing, oral literature, or diaries. A. Solzhenitsyn and Anne Frank, for instance were only published outside their own societies.
\textsuperscript{6} Hollander (2006)(2007).
\textsuperscript{7} Stern (2008); Hollander (2006).
\textsuperscript{8} i.e. the Press, using Lord Macaulay’s definition: Oxford (1992:156).
\textsuperscript{9} Hollander (2007) and Stern (2008) compare the mass disappearances of journalists and intellectuals in Stalinist Russia with the over-hyped “persecution” of critics in the US at the same time. Journalists are still at risk in contemporary Russia, especially if they assert biography which is unflattering to the political leadership: 261 have been murdered since 1989: Spiegel.de (2006).
example, pro-Soviet/Marxist/Maoist/Cuban (etc) ideology can not only operate freely, but can be, has been, and is still, incorporated into discussion of life writing through the academy\(^1\). Meanwhile, there is no tradition of, for instance, instance, anti-Stalinist or anti-Castro literature as being officially sanctioned or even tolerated in the societies these leaders have operated in\(^2\). There are, and have been, active controls over the content and representation of leadership and State views of social norms in any society, but in the Anglosphere this seems to have turned to a normative minority discourse. Note for instance, a recent study which has found an active discursive exclusion of gays or blacks in official, State-promoted Cuban literature, which includes biography\(^3\). It could be said that in contemporary Anglosphere academic literature displays a socially disproportionate foregrounding of once marginalised groups and ostracised ideologies through the tendentious post-modernist academy\(^4\).

This seems to be particularly true for the type of ideological-political sympathies embedded in the TPMA, which are philosophically and lineally related to Marxism\(^5\). That is, an academic fixation has developed in the tendentious literature for ideologies and regimes which are oppositional to, and sometimes sworn to the destruction of, the very society the literature is generated in, and from which the tendentious academics have the freedom to criticise. Interestingly, the strongest pro-totalitarian tradition in biography seems to have been a concerted, mid-20\(^{th}\) Century Russian sponsored system of cultural and ideological exports\(^6\) targeted at France’s academy, where it enjoyed wide acceptance before it arrived in the Anglosphere academy\(^7\). There could very well be a causative link between the lack of openness in the French biographical tradition, and the very strident pro-totalitarianism evident in the French academy’s historically favourable treatment of Stalin’s life and work\(^8\). At the same time, the Anglosphere’s Francophile academic literature\(^9\) demonstrates a resistance to popular themes, media and expressions of life writing which foreground the individual, agency, and pluralism; norms more commonly found in the wider community. In its dogmatic and hegemonic pursuit of conformity in the TPMA, the tendentious literature displays a tendency towards totalitarianism itself in its insistence on the correct interpretation and writing of lives. I would assert that this is nothing more than ideology masquerading as enquiry. Whether it can

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3 “Gays are absent entirely; black persons are simply referred to as ‘the black’…racism is a classic non-topic”: de la Fuente (2000:1, 31). It is also true that as the power of Fidel Castro has declined, the status of Cuban gays (for instance) has dramatically improved in recent years. This is presumably the result of Raul Castro’s management and perhaps a younger set of dynamics which informs the current leadership: Offord (2009:3).
4 For example: are Strachey, Capote, Woolf and others privileged for being homosexual or because they represent the post-modern ideology, or for intrinsic talent?
6 The duplicitous nature of Cold War “cultural exports” was tied to favourable Western, principally French, academic portrayal of Stalin and others (Hollander: 2007).
7 Hollander (2007).
9 Hamilton (2007).
also be considered as mythologising in the interests of promoting ideologically motivated biography is a separate question.

**Myth**

Myth is one lexical item which needs to be re-considered in the light of this discussion. Its significance is critical in the literature since it is wielded so much pragmatic force disproportionate to its semantic qualities, such that it now operates as an ideological weapon. The familiar definition of myth as “a supernatural account explaining natural phenomena, or dealing with the supernatural”\(^1\) has been extended in popular usage to the point where it now signifies “any invented story…an imaginary or fictitious thing or person…a collective belief that is built up in response to the wishes of a group”\(^2\). In addition Barthes’ use of the term concentrates on its arbitrariness as a:

> Semiologic association…myth is a type of speech chosen by history; it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things…a mode of signification, a form…everything can be a myth (it) is a pure ideographic system\(^3\).

This last extension of the lexeme enjoys currency as a term of invective, such that it caries connotations of “illusion…duplicity”\(^4\). As such it carries enormous enormous weight and force connotatively when applied in the literature, deriving its signifying authority from its social location and prestige. Myth is used interchangeably with “fallacy”, “invention”, “fiction”, “metaphorical truth”, “religious conviction”\(^5\) and “construction”\(^6\).

Nevertheless the same semiotic rationale used to promote the use of the term myth can be interrogated for its own constructedness, especially for the degree to which sometimes generalising assumptions underlie the assertion that texts present as and are produced through mythologising. The sophistry with which the term myth is employed to describe the belief systems of others, particularly in the TPMA literature, is transparently a product of construction itself. The critical distance, geographically, socially, ideologically and chronologically, between the assertion and the constructed other, facilitates the deictic removal and subsequent construction of other which occurs. In a linguistic and lexical sense, usage determines categorisation in the same way that Barthes can confidently assert the ‘truth’ of semiology when even the discussion of semiology is contingent upon its own constructionism. That is, the constructedness of “metallanguage” as a semiotic system to describe language is, as with any human linguistic system\(^8\), entirely arbitrary and highly highly conventional itself- a point which escapes Barthes himself.\(^9\) This is why why the assertion of mythologising carries a dubious, but enormous weight of

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1. OED (2009).
5. As in: “the central myths of Judeo-Christian culture”: Booker (1991:1)
6. All other items found in OED (2009).
referentiality. Any referential link to myth in a discussion of life writing suggests overt didacticism at both the semantic and connotative level. This facilitates an opposition between empiricist claims for historiography and the freedom of form and function ostensibly associated with creative writing. It also explains why the TPMA is so heavily dependent on the opportunities afforded by the “ethical paradox” within post-modernism. These can be referred to as a choice between either “indifference or solidarity; the two sharply opposed versions of post-modern tolerance”\(^1\). There is no doubt that this association with myth has negative connotations, and it does little to enhance biography’s claim as an asset to either history or literature, so that the rudimentary, even causative connection is not considered as a benign feature:

> The very word myth still casts a shadow of fraud…not just an illusion but a falsehood, intended to deceive (it) means a lie peddled about in a culture…the fault does not lie so much in the tales as in the tellers…when the tales are held to enclose some inalienable truth that serves the purpose of the tellers\(^2\).

To this end, it is likely that biographical forms have always been intertwined with the strictly religious and cultural instructional narratives embedded in all cultures:

> Mythic narratives are central to cultural identity…because they convey some significant truth about the relationship between human beings and the source of being…they express any given culture’s literal or metaphorical understanding of various aspects of reality\(^3\).

This association, not only with the form and function of myth, but the author/s’ cultural framework, is significant, since the role of the storyteller has also been much questioned in recent decades in the literature\(^4\). The traditional cultural sanctity of the narrator, the lore-master, or knowledge as articulated and endorsed by social convention, seems to be largely discredited contemporarily\(^5\). Indeed, the attack on the parable, the allegory and moral tale tale seems to have impacted dramatically on the authority of the unitary, narrative voice\(^6\).

Thus, it is perfectly obvious that myth is a derogatory term used to destabilise the belief systems, and construction of others with whom the critic disagrees. There is common acceptance semantically and pragmatically for the lexical item myth which is oppositional to the sporadic usage in the TPMA literature where myth becomes a type of false reality which is almost exclusively applied to marginalise the other. This is why TPMA usage seems to have reinforced the impact of myth as invective. It is especially useful when

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1 Bauman (1992:xxiii).
3 Leeming (2005:xi).
4 Currie (1998); Barthes (1972); Foucault (1979).
describing the views of other academics, but more especially the general public's views. As an inclusive example, Greer states that any Australian narrative which ignores Aboriginal history is “a myth of national origin…a fraudulent fantasy (since) myths are by definition untrue”\textsuperscript{1}.

Probably in a relativist mood, the synonymous term “metaphorical truth” builds on Barthes' ideas of arbitrarily signified truth\textsuperscript{2} for the myth-holder, regardless of the objective, knowable or perhaps simply wider, conventional, reality with which it can be compared. It is when:

A given truth may be expressed by a metaphor. It is particular usages that are literal or metaphorical, and not particular facts. We do acknowledge that there may be two (or more) ways of expressing the same state of affairs\textsuperscript{3}.

In practice, however the term metaphorical truth, however well intentioned as a connotatively neutral label, operates pragmatically as a synonymous dysphemism signifying a belief system which is deluded or erroneous but which is also an ultimately naïve, unsophisticated world-view. It is in this sense that myth is applied to texts and authors involved in biography.

**Myth and popular biography-celebrity**

The link between myth and the individual is nowhere clearer than in the life writing of celebrity, where the term myth seems to be synonymous with icon\textsuperscript{4}. The cult of celebrity builds on the equation of selfhood plus a prioritising of the individual: “modern life is built on the cult of the individual…the self is the holy object of the society carried by the medium of the individual”\textsuperscript{5}. This raises the question of how much mythologising is contained within the biography of celebrities, as part of marketing. The issue of subjectivity as facilitative for fiction or myth has been discussed, and the tendency to fiction is obviously part of the literacy of the life writing readership. It can be stated that subjectivity remains a desirable and central element in life writing, as an integral feature of the appeal of life writing. This seems to be particularly true when the subject is young, famous and recently dead, the archetypal version of the cult of celebrity:

There is a system of celebrity which continues even though individuals come and go. The system depends on an interaction between celebrities and their audiences. The celebrity system is related to capitalism in that personality is made into a commodity\textsuperscript{6}.

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\textsuperscript{1} Greer (2008).
\textsuperscript{2} Barthes (1972).
\textsuperscript{3} Soskice (1985:70).
\textsuperscript{4} Marshall (1997); Schickel (1985).
\textsuperscript{5} Rothenbuhler & Coman (2005:99).
\textsuperscript{6} Marshall (1997:95).
Celebrity is a twentieth-century phenomenon, created especially by movies and television (this) culture of celebrity... is undermining many traditional practices.

This idea of uncritical biographical practice undermining traditional understandings of the separation between fact and fiction can be meaningfully compared to the propaganda efforts of totalitarian leaderships. The essential difference is that it occurs in a capitalist, democratic system and in a voluntary way. This demonstrates quite clearly that a social imperative exists, which is unlike that of the imperative in a totalitarian state, because the media is responding to an upward social imperative; it is not imposed from 'above'.

That is why the recent biographical reports in the English-language print media over the death of the Australian actor Heath Ledger have been overwhelmingly uncritical and sympathetic. Somewhere between the social capital of a young, handsome celebrity and the enduring cultural force of the adage “Never speak ill of the dead” the reporters are very careful to offer assessments favourable to the actor’s memory. Indeed, the active suppression of unflattering surveillance video of the actor in a “Hollywood drug party” has been justified on the basis of “respect for the actor’s family”. This is further evidence of the selective type of self-censorship applied by media for favoured subjects, and for inconsistent reasons. Of course, as time passes, there seems to be less resistance to critical appraisal of the biographical subject:

There is nothing noble or beautiful about the so-called accidental death of Heath Ledger, a man with everything to live for - a beautiful daughter, a blossoming career, and a Victoria's Secret catalogue-full of willing babes...He threw it away, as gamely as if he had put a gun to his mouth and pulled the trigger. He was reckless and greedy. He was fundamentally selfish.

Although there is certainly an inclination towards the hagiographic in celebrity life writing, it is also true that a strident iconoclasm exists alongside it: as seen in the continuing ambivalent reporting over the life (and death) of Michael Jackson. Indeed, despite the potential for hagiography in any form of life writing, it is evident that biography in contemporary English-speaking societies is not really comparable with that found in totalitarian regimes. Nowhere in Australia, the USA or the UK is biography a state-sponsored and controlled activity in which the author writes to a programme that suppresses authorial

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1 Schickel (1985).
2 Attributed to Samuel Johnson, but traceable to the ancient Greek magistrate Chilon: Simpson (1990:209).
3 E! Entertainment; The Insider and Entertainment Tonight all decided to stop screening the video: E! Entertainment (2008).
4 Compare the persistent coverage of Princess Diana, which continues to this day or the decision by The Daily Telegraph (31-1-2008) to provide the video of Heath Ledger online despite the general media decision not to. The Sydney Morning Herald (31-1-2008) also decided to run the video online.
5 Less than a week in this case, however with predictable "outrage": the provocative comments are from Andrea Peyser, writing in the New York Post: Mitchell (2008).
freedom or personal views. Authorial dissent from official government policy or representation, in the Anglosphere is not a punishable offence outside the constraints of libel.

**Myth and biography, or the TPMA problem with biography**

Life writing’s descent from early oral literature attaches an association with legend and myth, and this connection is frequently questioned for veracity: “the past is expressed through a series of collective myths. Mythical narratives are explanatory, connecting the past to the present and providing a historical rationale for the existence of [society]”. Revisiting one definition of post-modernist theory, it is stated that:

Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favors "mini-narratives," stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability.

An approach favouring mini-narratives would seemingly favour biography, since the individual’s life narrative is fore-grounded for its intrinsic appeal. On the other hand, it is recognised that a binarity exits:

Part of the genre’s attraction is the notion that we will discover more about ourselves if we read the lives of others. Modern culture like ours doesn’t have one overarching explanation of life, and I think a lot of people are on a personal quest for understanding...if we are one of those post-modern doubters, we are more likely to turn to the life of someone...who has a story to tell. Who knows- they may have the answers we seek.

The contradiction arises over the TPMA need to diminish the role and status of truth and universality, and ultimately this is an issue of control over the meaning of life writing itself. The very appeal of biography is in its non-fiction status and applicability to the reader, wherein lies human universality of emotion, experience and relationships. The question of whether fictionalising occurs in biography has already been addressed: it is present in any life writing text and it is assumed to be so, usually without any serious loss of credibility. Still, when it is deliberate or present to any significant degree, it seriously compromises the generic integrity of biography, and the same can be said for mythologising. Mythologising can be re-considered as deliberate manipulation of fiction for ideological purposes rather than simply an inadvertent product of memory deficiency. That is, mythologising by interpreting a life though any prism of ideology, exclusively or to any intrusive

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1 Darian-Smith (1997:2).
2 Klages (2007).
3 Batchelor (2003:2-5).
4 Freedman (2002).
6 This is my alternative definition.
degree, imposes a subjective, intrusive, authorial externality on the subject’s life.

An important point which seems to be at issue here is one on which there does seem to be wide acceptance: whether at the academy level or in popular literacy for the reading and production of life writing. And that is, that fictionalising is understood as being present to some degree in any item of biography. Or, a biography’s integrity is contingent on generic adherence, but that any biography is read (and accepted or discarded) primarily on the basis of access to the subject. In some cases there is high tolerance for how information is mediated. Overall, however, the reader holds the author accountable for how the data is manipulated. The problem is the use of the term myth, which is widely understood as being synonymous with significantly untrue. I will further demonstrate that there exists a popular understanding of this concept, and that it is tolerated (even sought after) in the general popular readership of life writing. The issue is that the term myth (and similar emphasis on fictionalising) is hyperbolised in the Barthesian and TPMA literature to diminish the fact of substantial truth which is integral to generic integrity. Or, to put it another way, the typical reader of biography is well aware of the “unitary subject” of life writing and the process of mediation of information between memory and authorial voice, and between authorial voice and reader actualisation of that voice for themselves. There is no contradiction between the general understanding of what reading constitutes and the Barthesian foregrounding of the reader over author. The metalanguage may be unfamiliar, but as I will show, the readership of biography is more literate than the TPMA perceives them to be. This is why the TPMA overstates its case, failing to appreciate how suspicious and informed the readership of life writing actually is. The texts that the TPMA privileges (Strachey, Woolf, Capote, etc) are self-conscious, deliberate and contrived. They are auteur texts. They are irrelevant to life writing overall for the same reason that Obama, Princess Diana and Hazel Hawke are relevant as texts: the life-narrative, with all of its mediations and subjectivity, is understood as being secondary to the subject and the subject’s reality.

Hagiography as a label is an extreme example of this concept of mythologising, moving from its narrow specificity to a usage denoting any biography which uncritically monumentalises its subject, as well as “policing and censoring life stories viewed as subversive”. It could be (perhaps controversially) applied to the narrow selection and treatment of favoured subjects and authors in the TPMA canon, since it excludes texts which are subversive of its frameworks. There is a didactic, even proselyting impulse in any foregrounding of canonical texts: “the primary aim of critical discourse, the impulse for talking about books, is to persuade someone else to appreciate what the critic finds valuable about a literary text”.

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1 Jolly (2001: Author); Barthes (1985).
2 Jolly (2001).
4 Hamilton (2008:14).
5 Bennett & Royle (2004:45).
The utility of biography for social elites

I would suggest from this discussion and the treatment of life writing in the literature, that biography seems to occupy a particularly volatile social niche, where its utility as hagiography for powerful elites has long been recognised. It has certainly come in for special attention from Barthes and post-modernism in general as an ideological token of control. The use of biography in Stalinist Russia offers a clear link between life writing and its utility for popular control in state-sponsored propaganda:

The re-writing and telling (of) lives of Soviet leaders inside the USSR was a form of consistent propaganda targeted at motivating and moulding the Soviet population. This Orwellian form of re-writing and faking history was part and parcel of indoctrination of generations of Soviets, and the creation of these falsified biographies helped these systems to create gods.

Interestingly, there has been and continues to be a particularly strident receptivity in parts of the Western academy for such hagiographic propaganda. Indeed, it is quite easy find a strong tradition of analogous, uncritical life writing occurring in the West when, for instance sympathetic intellectuals apply themselves to the commemoration of totalitarian leaders:

Western Revolutionary romanticism (is) pre-disposed to this form of propaganda...Just think of Barbusse’s description of Stalin as ‘a man in a uniform of a soldier, a face of a worker and a brain of a scholar’.

It has been asserted that a particularly left-leaning “two-thirds preponderance” exists in the US for “prominent contemporary intellectuals”. If the TPMA was constituted by a similar political makeup, it would render the narrow ideology and select canonisation explicable in the context of an academic grouping reliant upon its essentially French Marxist ideological basis: “as Marxists (they) are hostile to the individual...therefore (they) revelled in anti-biographical depictions (ordering) the excision of any remnants of bourgeois influence- especially individualism”. Of course the imported anti-biographical sentiment is consistent with the select idealization or hagiography of certain persons who represent Socialism: leaders, intellectuals and the prototype/archetypal worker. Hitler, Castro, Mao, Lenin and Stalin have all been ‘proletarianised’ and then endlessly reproduced in posters, film and life writing through depictions of the ideal worker, soldier or citizen. Castro, for instance, despite personal conflict with Ernesto Guevara, openly stylised his ex-comrade for proletariat consumption and edification through various

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2 Stern (2008).
4 Stern (2008:3-4).
8 Hollander (2007).
media\textsuperscript{1}. It is a sentimentality that continues. For instance it is possible to find, even now, openly hagiographic treatments of Castro in the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Cuban revolution:

For nearly 40 years I have been an activist-a militant-in the worldwide socialist movement…when I was asked to write about Fidel Castro I jumped at the chance…I had become a friend of and partisan for (him) and the revolutionary ideals of genuine freedom and liberty for which he stood…the reader should know that this is no dispassionate account. I believe that (he) is one of the greatest men of the twentieth century and that he will be remembered and revered\textsuperscript{2}.

This seems to be especially ironic given, for instance, the Cuban leader’s openly anti-homosexual comments and incarceration of gays and other “dissidents”\textsuperscript{3}: a discursive stance at odds with the Western academy’s inclusive attitude\textsuperscript{4}. It seems to be consistent, however, with the self-imposed censorship operative in the tendentious academy (and sympathetic media) for troubling details that could be considered ideologically disloyal:

Saddam Hussein is clearly popular…there is widespread confidence in his leadership, the allegations of political violence in Iraq are a racist fantasy…Iraqi prisons are a model for Western prisons…conditions there are superior\textsuperscript{5}.

Christopher Hitchens, the biographer of Trotsky, has had some second thoughts (but) ‘even today (he writes) a faint saintly penumbra emanates from the Old Man (and) Che Guevara’s certainty and courage gave him his authenticity…the blend of idealism and action’\textsuperscript{6}.

Interestingly, Hitchens nevertheless remarks that the “cult of Che”, as realised or expressed in the 2004 biopic based on Guevara’s “formative” diary\textsuperscript{7}, exceeds any ideological premise:

He belongs more to the romantic tradition than the revolutionary one. To endure as a romantic icon, one must not just die young, but die hopelessly. Che fulfils both criteria. When one thinks of Che as a hero, it is more in terms of Byron than Marx\textsuperscript{8}.

Hitchens is an enigmatic figure in his departure from an “orthodox left”, in that he retains some core allegiances (to Lenin and Trotsky, for instance), while publicly maintaining a “contrarian” stance against the “solidarity of belonging” in the academy\textsuperscript{9}. He criticises academic complicity in, or simply naïveté

\textsuperscript{1} Hollander (2006:142,330-333); Galloway (2006).
\textsuperscript{2} Galloway (2006:6-9).
\textsuperscript{3} de la Fuente (2000); Hollander (2006:234).
\textsuperscript{4} Hollander (2007:284).
\textsuperscript{6} As quoted in Hollander (2006:237).
\textsuperscript{7} The Motorcycle Diaries (2004): BD Cine; director Walter Salles.
\textsuperscript{8} O’Hagan (11-7-2004).
\textsuperscript{9} Hollander (2007:229-231).
regarding, the often openly ideological biographical treatments of totalitarian leaders within and exterior to those regimes. This system of complicity, it has been claimed, has unfortunately been operative for the spread of misinformation and propaganda which have contributed to the prolonged success of such tyrants in maintaining power\(^1\). It seems that the evidence was there all the time, perhaps ironically, in the life writing employed for propaganda purposes, whatever the apparent ambiguities of their public actions. To be disambiguated, all we had to do was read the autobiographical works of the tyrants before they came to power:

It has often been said that had Western leaders read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* they would have been somewhat better equipped than they were to deal with him. Some familiarity with Mao’s speeches and writings, together with the major works which provide their conceptual framework, would assist leaders of the present generation to an equal degree\(^2\).

The inattention to detail leads to the imperative of “seeing without the imposition of standards or values which could lead to the making of critical judgments…the American social experience of pluralism and diversity…and does not constitute the lens through which Americans can successfully examine\(^3\) such discourses. It is hardly surprising then, that the popular life representations of charismatic leaders such as Mao, Castro or Guevara are not only erroneous and enduringly so, but also tenacious for a distinct lack of detail. Although the image of Guevara adorns many T-shirts worn by tertiary students, it is unlikely that general biographical literacy extends beyond graphic mythologising and a biopic\(^4\). Indeed, the film can be seen as reprising or paralleling the original Catholic hagiography:

The entire movie, in its concept and tone, exudes a Christological cult of martyrdom, a cult of adoration for the spiritually superior person who is veering toward death—precisely the kind of adoration that Latin America’s Catholic Church promoted for several centuries, with miserable consequences\(^5\).

It is conceivable that this simplified form of life representation is not confined to an especially undergraduate level of understanding, but is rather informed by cultural norms installed over several decades by previous generations of myth-makers in socially influential positions. I would argue that the “cult of Che”\(^6\) as an instance of reductionist life writing is informed by an entirely uncritical element in the TPMA. This would indicate that there is a tendency in this part of the academy towards the reductionist, all-encompassing lens which seeks to find some ultimate teleological frame in life representation.

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\(^1\) Griffith (2005); Hamilton (2007:164).

\(^2\) Griffith (2005:81). This includes the frequently autobiographical works by Mao, such as: *On the Protracted War* and *Selected Works* as quoted in Griffiths (2005:73-81).

\(^3\) Hollander (2007:284).

\(^4\) Berman (2004).

\(^5\) Berman (2004).

The reductionist-tendentious trend in the academy

This teleological tendency, I suggest, is a very human predisposition and unremarkable, given the uses of biography over history and the variety of its cultural manifestations\(^1\). The fact that it can be found in the life writing academy may seem unlikely, at first. Indeed, Jolly’s (2008) endorsement of Narrative Therapy is especially surprising, given her editorial and established role in the literature\(^2\). Nevertheless, it is and has been a feature of academic enquiry in the field of life writing since Woolf and Strachey, if not beyond. To suggest any schismatic or tendentious frame for writing biography is to present it as a solution to the biographer’s methodological dilemma\(^3\). There does not seem to have been any shortage of proffered solutions in the past 50-100 years of biographical theory, as Adams most recently and succinctly delineated\(^4\). Post-modernism, and the TPMA’s uses of it, therefore should be seen merely as a recent but very powerful schema in a long series of schemata. Hamilton suggests that although many schisms have been abandoned in the past, each leaves a trace in the constantly evolving, but essentially historiographical foundation of life writing\(^5\). Perhaps Jolly was merely offering another facet to the already crowded, multi-faceted pantheon of life writing schemata.

In this perspective, therefore, TPMA can be compared for overall relevance to schisms such as psycho-biography, post-colonialism, feminism, Marxism, and New Historicism\(^6\). Each contributes new perspectives and ways of reading, but they are not by any means holistic. Storr, for instance, lists many Freudian concepts popularised by Ellman “which have become so much part of ordinary discourse (that) we cannot do without them as platitudes”\(^7\). It is debatable as to who the “we” constitutes here but the point is valid to some extent. Whether “narcissism, sublimation, (and) wish fulfilment”\(^8\) are actually part of the vernacular or are more restricted to sympathetic academic lenses is more important. They are examples of lenses popular with the TPMA, but limited in appeal beyond the canon. They are produced by the TPMA, for the TPMA, in precisely the same way as the historical constructs before them operated to naturalise privileged knowledges and ways of seeing, in the anterior version of the academy-establishment. The idea of a ‘correctional’ lens with which to portray and view the subject is, oddly, still a feature of the TPMA, despite the inherent contradiction for ‘knowing’, even teleology, that it presents. To reduce a subject to a Marxist reading, for instance, should be seen as nothing more than another form of mythologising. It is caricaturing, motivated by ideology, and no better than its criticised and targeted life writing opposite, since it performs the same reductionist function. The idea of unlimited variant discursive ‘readings’ of a subject may have some application

\(^1\) Jolly (2001).
\(^2\) Jolly (2001).
\(^3\) As articulated most completely by Edel (1987).
\(^5\) Hamilton (2007:279-291). This is supported by Jolly (2001) who, significantly, accords roughly even space to each major entry.
\(^6\) Donaldson (2006).
\(^7\) In Batchelor (2003:77).
\(^8\) Batchelor (2003:77).
to the end-user\(^1\), but the biographer does not have that interpretive luxury in any generic sense of accountability to subject. Hagiography and hatchet jobs are most certainly parallel ends of the same ideologising function, however else they may differ.

To interpret a subject through fashionable philosophical or psychological theory also leaves the author stranded in or limited to a particular time and place, spatially and philosophically. The biography quickly becomes anachronistic and exposes the author to criticism or what might be worse-relevance. Additionally, to locate the subject in the ideas or moods contemporary to the author is to make a serious misjudgement: “[the author] must not import alien attitudes and values so that the past is distorted into a reflection of the present. In short, the past has to be understood on its own terms”\(^2\). This is particularly applicable to the fashion of Freudian psychoanalytical biography which persisted until the 1970s\(^3\). Authors such as Edel, Ellman, Erikson, Namier and Painter invested their biographies with Freudian principles of analysis, but some of their interpretations are now being “cautiously” questioned\(^4\). For instance Namier sought to understand the mental condition of King George III in Freudian terms, but subsequent medical opinion asserts that the monarch’s condition was predominantly caused by a chemical imbalance comparable to schizophrenia\(^5\). Another criticism of such interpolation of an author’s preconceptions is that the biographer will seek only to project what is already assumed, ignoring any evidence to the contrary. One commentator describes this practice as “hazardous”, a “posthumous diagnosis”\(^6\). Further, “the difficulty with psychohistory is that instead of representing history as an influence upon the individual, it makes history a kind of Greek chorus confirming what is already assumed to be there”\(^7\).

The supposition by such authors that they are applying critical method is both dated and erroneous. There is an almost total absence of historiography because their research is negated by a misguided agenda unresponsive to material evidence: “Sartre says, if it didn’t happen this way, it happened in some way like it; Erikson says, if it didn’t happen, it as good as happened”\(^8\). Another commentator has remarked: "If we are too confident in our judgements of character we actually end up writing instead of (biography) a kind of speculative teleology: what he should have done had he lived differently or longer”\. In such cases, the very basis of the biography is compromised by a questionable proposition: if not useless, the text is certainly devalued as a biographical work, regardless of its narrative appeal. As well, they are subject to revision, as shown above and in the comments of D.H. Lawrence, who was influenced by Freudian principles in his own work, only to

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\(^1\) Bennett & Royle (2004:10-12).
\(^2\) West (1973:7).
\(^3\) Jolly (2001).
\(^4\) Batchelor (2003:77).
\(^5\) West (1973:7-8).
\(^6\) Ellman (1973:7-8,11).
\(^7\) Ellman (1973:7-8,11).
\(^8\) Ellman (1973:7-8,11).
regret the resultant imprecision\(^1\). Indeed, Paul Kendall indicates that this type of text, which Donaldson calls “tendentious”\(^2\) but which he calls “critical biography” and which “emphasises the biographer’s attitude or ideological stance towards a subject” is not only “dull and uninteresting”, but is also suspect as a form of biography itself\(^3\). It would appear that the ideological view of the biographer’s role, as expressed by James Stanfield in his 1813 essay, has much in common with this type of “reductionist biography”. He wrote that the biographer should “not only describe, but connect; not only to narrate, but philosophise”\(^4\). This would place psychohistory in the same bracket as the didactic Victorian-era biographies, or any other phase of biography where the moral or philosophical imperative is pervasively obtrusive; and which much of this contemporary Strachey-esque, schismatic life writing actively writes against. There is nothing, from the historical context, to indicate that the current evident security of tendentious post-modernism in the academy won’t follow psychoanalysis into the file of faded literature trends- whatever traces it might leave in the process of deconstructing itself.

Thus, tendentious ideological advocates seem to forget that their very existence is conditional upon an acceptance of arbitrariness in signification, of which they are merely another, more recent, fashionable example. This lack of reflexive self-discursive awareness is surprising, given the claims made for the prioritised social knowledge authority of the academy, but understandable given the dominant tendentious discursive hegemonic construction of that knowledge systematised through its own discourse. It conceivably represents therefore, rather than an insight into the true nature of biography, a distortion. It is an artificial construct based on an artificial and flawed premise. Additionally the wider social disjunct, or the removal from experience and re-articulation as narrative, presents a dilemma for the confidence awarded the narrator/author in the traditional sense and social-textual location. Put simply, the TPMA problem with biography is that, while disenfranchising, silencing and marginalising the popular and majority expressions of biography as mythologising and ideologically aberrational, the TPMA indulges in its own mythologising of, not only its choice of subjects, but also the ideological prisms with which to read, produce and make meaning of life writing.

**Further evidence for generic integrity: popular life writing as an act of rebellion against ideological use and abuse of biography**

I want to suggest that the manipulation of life writing by elites- whether in the TPMA or in dictatorships- produces two unintended effects. The first is that it produces a higher scepticism and disillusionment with the regime that produces it. The second is that it actually validates the core element of biographical trust, by offering such a transparent forgery of life writing with which to compare it. Both are evidenced by the large numbers of biographies produced in response to the totalitarian experience, especially by persons

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\(^1\) Lawrence (1994:2-3).

\(^2\) Donaldson (2006).

\(^3\) Hutch (1997:x).

\(^4\) Hutch (1997:34).
disenchanted with, or the victims of, former ideology. The huge scale and
democratic nature of life writing produced beyond either the TPMA or
totalitarian regimes seems vindication enough of the popular uses and
important discursive appeal which cannot be controlled. It seems also that a
particular stimulus is provided by persons seeking freedom from regimes of
truth and ideological control. It is, therefore feasible that the very excesses
and abuses of the generic trust inherent in the social practice of life writing, as
perpetrated by totalitarian-mythologising tendencies of gatekeepers in the
past and present, actually enhance the status of, and trust in, biography as a
core social practice and artefact. That is, it is acknowledged in the very act of
propaganda that biography has enormous power in the construction of
ideology because there pre-exists a fundamental social need for and trust in
it. This pre-discursive, sub-ideological need explains why the attempts at
controlling life writing tend to backfire, if not immediately, then at some point in
the future, as a result of official suppression, since such coercion seems to
only invite rebellion. Latent core, sub-ideological human needs for
individuality, self-representation, selfhood and socialising seem to surface
very quickly after restraints are relaxed, removed, or simply become
intolerable.

Biography as subversive-great literature, and the TPMA as increasingly
irrelevant

I want to propose a controversial link between totalitarian practice and the
lack of engagement with popular life writing by the TPMA. That link is the
concept of the individual and it is a political-ideological control. A totalitarian
society which privileges biography, especially state-sponsored and controlled
biography, as an ultimate ‘truth’ which cannot be questioned, is also
producing a cultural artefact representative of endorsed and officially
sanctioned ideology. The salient feature of this type of fabricated discourse is
that it privileges only certain lives which are most typically those of the ruling
or cultural elite. The deliberate exclusion of other lives from this privileged
cultural discourse is an attempt to maintain the very discourse that produced
the artefact in the first place. The projection of the archetypal canonical life-
text as an ideal social type is a fiction meant to provide aspirational role
modelling. Much of this gatekeeper control is also applicable to the TPMA,
with its links to:

Decades of Marxist and neo-Marxist theorising…ideology and French
theorising… about persons-in-general (which) has substantial
limitations in enabling us to understand the behaviour of individual
(with) the academic bias against individual life history.

The lack of engagement with popular life writing is a ―textual silence‖, or an
ideological “false unity”, offering instead an insight into the priorities and

1 Hollander(2007)(2008) lists hundreds of these. Others include Orwell (1944)(2003), Frank
2 Stern (2008:3-4).
discourse of the TPMA. It is linked to the Marxist conception of self and the individual, where the non-Marxist conception is actively suppressed by exclusion. The Marxist collectivist model where the rights of the individual are subordinate to the rights of the group\(^1\) is ultimately unsatisfying for the assertion of selfhood by the individual\(^2\). The subject, defined in a Marxist-Freudian frame clashes with the Cartesian view of the individual as “a knowing, unitary, autonomous person, thereby challenging any claim to simple rationality, and a clear and fixed identity”\(^3\). The highly insistent TPMA voice which asserts the role of social construction is at odds with the very reason biographies are produced and read: a biography expresses the message of how a person is different to other people, to social construction, to life’s challenges, even to their own personal and personality, day to day, year to year\(^4\).

Indeed, it is possible to see that the central, most essential function of biography is the validation of self. Where world-view is tied to notions of self and individuality, it is logical that biography remains a fundamental obstacle, in the hands and minds of the common people, to the type of ideology which prizes the Marxist socially constructed, centrally controlled, collective interest doctrine\(^5\). It is evident that biography means something entirely different to an ideologue from, for instance Soviet Russia or Maoist China. For the Anglosphere inhabitant, of paramount concern is the rights of the individual:

> Individualism, which perhaps reaches its greatest emphasis in American culture…society is imagined to (exist) to protect the interests of idealized autonomous individuals…these individuals are themselves more important than any constituent grouping (e.g.) the importance Western cultures place on privacy and private property\(^6\).

Indeed, the notion of individualism cannot be overstressed in the context of post-war Western society as it relates to biography and its uses:

> Post-war biography (in) Western democracies had found (its) courage and soul, expressed in individuals…individuals had become determined to fight, and if necessary to die, for the freedom to be individuals\(^7\).

> The individual (is) in the foreground, whereas authoritarian ideology places the individual in the background…all this is anathema to the fundamentalist, who seeks to limit individuality, to accord human beings rigidly defined roles in a morality play called history\(^8\).

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\(^1\) Butler & Scott (1992:4-5).
\(^3\) Clegg & Hardy (1999:187).
\(^4\) Freadman (2003).
\(^5\) Hollander (2008).
\(^7\) Hamilton (1997:265).
\(^8\) Hamilton (2007:190).
\(^9\) King (2008).
Selfhood implies a personal history, friends, family, a sense of place and time, a public or common world to which one can relate oneself and against which one can define oneself.

There is a direct link between the notion of self and the popularity of reading others’ lives as a means of linking across communities. A facet of the “modern community” is the rise of popular culture such as film and television, in which “traditional authority has been eroded…and the audience seeks to identify itself in the text(s)”. This impulse is demonstrated by the reflective nature of studying another’s life to illuminate self: “life-writing and reading, and the comparison of people’s stories, can be a vicarious means of sustaining encounters with oneself…others’ stories can serve as ‘mirrors’ that reflect oneself…characteristics shared, even peculiarities, of a ‘common humanity’”. Bradford expressed it similarly: “the basis of biography is solidly established in the common identity of the human heart” and Dilthey agreed: “it invites introspection…it is the literary expression of the individual’s reflection on life…transferred to the understanding of another’s existence”. That is, subjectivity or the self, has become all important in biography. People who are reading biography do so for personal reasons: for entertainment; curiosity; edification; for spiritual, emotional or other, private, needs. But all these impulses are social, and assertive of locating the individual within the community. The biography is read to understand another’s individuality, and to link oneself individually, with that other self. There is no room for conformity.

Indeed, the view that life writing asserts individuality against the grain of TPMA or socialist ideology can be considered as an act of rebellion, even subversion. If great literature is truly subversive, then individualist, popular, spontaneous, non-conformist and democratic biography must be, potentially at least, great literature: a conclusion at odds with the TPMA’s contrived forms of life writing. Elitism here is connotatively inferior because it signifies a turning away from the risk of finding great literature outside a safe, familiar, comfortable canon. It is even more ironic when using the definition of great literature as that which moves the reader, challenges the accepted truths of a society, or which is subversive of normative controls. Life writing, in all its popular forms and media for more inclusive diversity, qualifies as great literature since it escapes, exceeds and undermines the controls placed on it as a form of expression by both the TPMA and political regimes where freedoms, individuality and personal control over self-representation are severely curtailed.

The un-resolvable dilemma for TPMA is in its insistence upon difference while naturalising and prescribing only certain types of difference, to the exclusion of all others. It is in conflict between “individualism and collectivism...a

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2 Darian-Smith & Hamilton (1997:24-5).
paradoxical combination of expecting egalitarianism and expecting to be treated as unique\textsuperscript{1}. Little wonder, then, that the debate becomes so heated, since it has become a matter of proselytising of incompatible and ultimately irreconcilable, worldviews, and biography becomes the site of extreme conflict. The struggle includes the retention of control over ways of seeing:

The more static a society is, the more likely it is that this stratum will acquire the position of a caste in that society...this monopoly by the closed and thoroughly organised stratum of intellectuals...a social group whose special task is to provide an interpretation of the world\textsuperscript{2}.

What is studied in schools and universities is the result of struggles over whose version of events is sanctioned. Knowledge is often the product of the subjugation of objects, or perhaps it can be seen as the process through which subjects are constituted as subjugated\textsuperscript{3}.

But if Postmodernism espouses populism, its works do not generally have mass appeal. Response is via theories which are incomprehensible, and purposely incomprehensible, to all but a well-read elite...Fail to grasp the theory and there is nothing there — which explains the bewilderment and distrust of the general public. The work seems fragmentary, arbitrary, lacking in skill and overall purpose, which it unashamedly is, from broader perspectives\textsuperscript{4}.

It is apparent therefore that the TPMA seeks to remake biography in its own image, or to interpret, produce and reshape biography to suit pre-conditions of the literature. As an example of the discursive distance between the popular and the elite text, it is apparent that the critically acclaimed, prize winning biographies which are usually also privileged as “seminal” or landmark or groundbreaking in the history of life writing are also usually widely un-read, even in the tertiary context\textsuperscript{5}. It could be said that a certain cannibalistic tendency exists: overall the literature produces in-house texts, then analyses those texts using its own text-based theory, only to produce more texts in response to its findings about these texts. The question remains, therefore, as to what function the TPMA actually serves if it is not responsive to the reality of life writing as a social practice. Irrelevance is perhaps “merely just another attempt to stay in control via theory”\textsuperscript{6}. The irony of course, is that, whereas most literature responds to practice and studies social realities, the literature and study of biography is actually aloof from all but an elite, highly subsidised and therefore suspiciously contrived practice confined to its own linguistic and social domain. This can be interpreted as a clumsy, un-engaging, mythologising, normative construct which is not subversive or great, but rather self-sustaining theory which is fraudulent as true Social Theory, since it doesn’t engage with any but its own society:

\textsuperscript{1}Hollander (2007:192).
\textsuperscript{2}Mannheim quoted in Hollander (2007:40).
\textsuperscript{3}Mills (1997:21).
\textsuperscript{4}Holcombe (2007).
\textsuperscript{5}Hamilton (2007:180).
\textsuperscript{6}Batchelor (2003:63).
It fulfils the cycle of self-validation, a concept recognisable from Discourse Analysis: it reproduces the narrow understanding of the genre; it reinforces the genre through repetition; and it excludes all competing forms from recognition as membership of the same genre\footnote{Bhatia et al (2008:23).}.

On the other hand there is a recognition that the academy in general must engage with the discourse beyond itself to maintain relevance: “It is good for (biography) not to be sealed into the academy (but) to cross the bridge from the market place and the academy…the writing and reading of literary biography can be welcomed as activities which can operate at a high and intellectually responsible level\footnote{Batchelor (2003:2).}.” Indeed wider engagement calls for a great application of technique and expertise to what is a highly complex life writing practice and readership. Primo Levi claims a rejection of post-modernism is feasible, since post-modernism is inadequate for contemporary “needs” and because it “originates in mental laziness…for it accepts absolutist statements which disregard complexity and differences of degree”\footnote{McCooey (1996:193-194).}. By contrast, recent biography is seen as seeking to understand the individual through a combination of cultural -including familial- influences and personal choices, and looks for complexity, rather than formulaic interpretations\footnote{Ellman (1973:9-16).}. Of course it is possible to reconcile post-modernism as understood by a minority in the academy with these central aims and needs for pluralism and inclusion, but the TPMA remains in control of life writing at the pedagogical and research levels.

Nevertheless, to see life writing as great literature, or perhaps a highly meaningful social artifact, is to find the essence of biography which is subliminal. It seeks commonality across difference, and reconciles individuality with common human needs. The individual solutions found by another person to specific challenges may resonate with each reader and with each reading. There is an internal teleology in any one person’s life, however narrated, which defies ideology: “Camus suggested that people read biography because they envy the coherence that lives achieve when recorded\footnote{Jolly (2001:112).}.” There is also the socialising nature of biography, a bottom-up construction of self relative and responsive to others, which is opposite to the imposed, top-down templating efforts of TPMA ideologues. In this personal and intimate relational contact, the readership and production of biography accommodates others in a truly pluralistic, even pantheonising tolerance. It is interpersonal and organic:

Compared with the images of our culture which post-modernism projects, biography is, in spite of its intertextual construction, fundamentally reactionary, conservative, perpetually accommodating new models of man, new theories of the inner self, into a personality-
oriented cultural mainstream, thus always helping to defuse their subversive potential\(^1\).

People in social groups derive their sense of belonging, and thus cohesion and confidence, from their sense of personal connection, kinship and inheritance...knowing who you are is, for humans, a fundamental aspect of living and...that knowledge must depend on knowing who others are, and were, too\(^2\).

Life writing, as a vibrant, highly-codified but diverse, constantly evolving social practice, stressing the democratic and autonomous nature of individuals, is attached formatively to the pluralistic ideological values of the Anglosphere. It also seems to be ready made as a form of social currency for transmission between individuals, cultures and nations, and this presents a new discursive dilemma for its evolution: the right of reply to the biographical text.

\(^1\) Batchelor (2003:2).
\(^2\) Hamilton (2007:3).
CHAPTER 4 Biography and the right of reply

Introduction

The authorial voice as articulated through the official form of life writing is increasingly under siege from within and without for the autonomy it has enjoyed for so long. Indeed the explosion in the production and consumption of formal and informal biographical media in recent years is evidence of a parallel form of biographical narrative which has moved beyond official, critical, academic or commercial control.

This has much to do with biographical method and accountability to subject and readership, and in the democratisation of biography the methodology of life writing has come under increased scrutiny. The biographer does not simply research or write: but rather mediates, translates, adjudicates and appropriates, before ultimately re-articulating what others have originally said. And yet the biographical subject and interested persons (i.e. the persons connected to the subject) do not relinquish memory and aspects of relationships when their data becomes the source material for a biography. These memories and emotional links remain the property of those who have shared them. This is particularly true when these persons feel that their memories have been betrayed or misrepresented, or when the interested person is not consulted at all, or their contributions ignored. The implication is that these views and memories are trivial, duplicated, wrong or irrelevant. This is an assessment made, necessarily in the process of biographical research, by the biographer in a process that is necessarily opaque.

In addition to the traditional demands placed on the biographer in what has been termed the biographer’s dilemma, balancing rules of historiographical evidence with conflicting subjectivities and the demands of narrative and media, there is a new, probably more stressful set of demands which together can be labelled the new biographer’s dilemma. This newer, more stringent and conflicting set of pressures are symptomatic of the information age, an era facilitative for and also largely resulting from the democratisation of biography itself. Therefore biography can be seen as a narrative expression of translation which is accountable to and measurable for accuracy against the original sources, and subject to readership cultural literacy to a degree never before experienced. This chapter will concentrate on the notions of power, representation and face. It will also compare the statements of commercially published biographers against the statements of data contributors who dissent from representations of their memories and relationships.

Overview

This research project was stimulated by the original aim of producing a biography of my father, the late K G Hale. It was a document-poor project.

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1 Riemer (1996).
which necessitated large-scale interviewing of a socially diverse group of persons, including: federal government ministers, church leaders, judges, tradesmen, stay at home mums and shop assistants. As with any biographer’s task, the issues of methodology in assessing data from such an eclectic group became apparent. In addition to the general historiographical, and specific biographer’s dilemma, as documented by Edel¹, Hamilton², Marwick³, Batchelor⁴ and Jolly⁵; there was suggested to my DA-inclined background a set of discursive interpersonal dynamics unique to the biographer’s situation. This can be summarised as, theoretically at least, one tertiary accredited person seeking to obtain autonomous control over often sensitive data held by other persons. The backing of a socially privileged institution⁶ (the university) via ethics approval and consent forms⁷ issued the biographer with social validation in order to elicit trust⁸ when consulting a variety of socially empowered persons for personal memories. However, in practice I found that the supposed privileged gatekeeper role of the academic biographer was entirely subject to local negotiation at the interpersonal level. That is, each interviewee acted as autonomous agent and gatekeeper of their own data, before, during and after the interview, and to a level of power. This is not consistent with much DA (and social) theory where institutional power typically acts upon social conditioning for force and validity, especially as it relates to control over systems of knowledge⁹. It particularly undermines the subject-agent/subjugation assumptions in much of the TPMA literature¹⁰.

Indeed, there was exercised an entirely local and inter-agential struggle over knowledge, such that knowledge itself was the real basis of power. Or, knowledge became the site of contestation, with the embedded power belonging to those who had the biographical data (memories), rather than institutional documentary evidence. This conflict over ownership is amenable to analysis through theories of face¹¹, negotiated discursive roles¹² and power differentials¹³.

Study 1. K G Hale¹⁴: An example from practice

The special interest in the study was the nature of how contestation over memory in the context of data collection for a biography is manifested through the actual responses. Attention was paid to the discourse analysis of utterances exhibiting power relations in regard to the potential power

¹ Edel (1957)(1987).
⁴ Batchelor (2003).
⁵ Jolly (2001).
⁷ Appendix D.
⁸ Riessman (1993:2).
⁹ Foucault (1997); Mills (1997); Butler (1997); Bourdieu (1991); Fairclough (1989).
¹¹ Goffman (1967).
¹³ Fairclough (1989).
¹⁴ K G Hale (1920-1991): political activist, local and state politician, businessman, charity worker, ecclesiastical minister, WW II veteran, family man and my late father.
differentials involving age, relationship to subject and biographer, religion, social status, gender, political affiliation, education and occupation. The data was analysed qualitatively for overall trends, content, and themes, using an inductive discourse analytical approach\(^1\). There are 2 main areas of findings:

1. The first is that the respondents all understood clearly the nature of biographical enquiry, research and generic purposes. They were all willing participants in the volunteering of memory and the nature of their relationship with the subject for the purpose of producing a biography of the subject, which they agreed was a worthwhile purpose, in principle. All participants had cultural literacy for biography, having read, produced or been actively involved in life writing interactions previously.

2. The second and more significant finding is the actual interaction between the biographer and the data contributors, as expressed in utterances and in non-verbal framing of interactions:
   - It was predictable by categories of respondents both for general content and for domain-register discursive features.
   - However the level of power differentials as expressed in prosodic-Suprasegmentals\(^2\) which underlined the force of utterances was evenly spread across all categories. This was unexpected.
   - Also unexpected were the explicit statements of ownership of material beyond simple relationship lines (density and plexity\(^3\)). These were expressed as simple directives and assertives, or in subtle interrogatives\(^4\); both at the time of interview or in follow-up communications when shown the on-going narrative manuscript.
   - Considering the diverse spread of participants from social groups, there was surprising uniformity in the expression of power over participants’ own submissions. This can be summarised as saying that respondents considered data supplied to be at the service of the biographer, but that they had not relinquished control over the uses of their memories, and they sought to be consulted extensively over the final textual product.

Sample utterances:

1. Context: Contest over narrative manuscript; an incident involving my father and myself, which was interpreted by family members as depicting K G Hale in an unfavourable light.

Wife\(^5\) (JAH): That’s not how I remember it. Why are you writing this? Are you trying to justify the lack of a relationship you had with your own father? (21-1-2004).

\(^1\) More information is contained in Appendix D.
\(^3\) Holmes (2008:193-198).
\(^5\) Relationship is to the subject: some anonymity is still a legal requirement.
Son #1 (MKH): Why are you writing this? This is classified information...Definitely and unequivocally (sic) humbug! The alternative explanation given by family is unquestionably correct...he’s still a hero no matter what you write1 (22-1-2004).

2. Context: a political meeting which officially never occurred.

Supreme Court Judge (MW): yes of course it happened. I think (TU) might have played a very strong role behind the scenes...Wran saw his power and will being thwarted...I would like to comment further, but I need to know what and how you are going to use this information. What libel and legal protection have you undertaken? (26-9-2003).

Whitlam Govt. Minister (TU): I was there at the behest of Bob Hawke. John Brown was there. Neville Wran was there too. The question was asked: What would it take to shut Ken Hale up...If this proceeds to the final stages, show me before publishing (8-5-2003).

3. Context: emailed conversation over family relationships.

Daughter (JGH): How do I know I can trust you with writing dad’s biography? All this is very confidential. I want to see it before you show it to anyone else and I control the final product when it comes to me (13-7-2005).


Business associate (JT): I’ve got no more to say to you about this...it’s best forgotten now...you can’t use any of this either...what have you said about me?2(4-4-2003).

Son (BFH): Dad said ‘never have a business partner’...what did JT say? Show me...(6-4-2003).


Queens Counsel (JHHB): after you left...something triggered my mind to recall a little more which may or may not be of assistance to you (plus) I would like to look at everything you attribute to me prior to inclusion.


Tradesman (GA): he opened up to me about the army days; he lost a lot of mates. He’d get choked up about it...he wouldn’t talk to you because you just couldn’t be taught...you just wouldn’t understand him, you never wanted to. You’ll never understand him no matter how many people you interview (29-8-2003).

1 This brother then produced an alternative biography of K G Hale in response.
2 He threatened to withdraw consent to use material previously voluntarily offered, but then neglected to formally request its withdrawal.
Interpreting the findings

In addition to the discursive properties of these interactions, it is evident that across the range of participants high cultural literacy for life writing was demonstrated. That is, participants compared their interviewing experience with expectations of what life writing entails: the conditions were felicitous for the operation of the task, generating a new social reality. They felt secure enough to express highly confidential information which in some cases was also legally and/or politically sensitive. Information supplied was relevant to the task, thus observing maxims of “tacit social co-operation” in a contracted context. There is evidence that the task was considered a collaborative effort with an external social goal: in this case producing a biography of the subject.

The fact that they felt empowered enough to claim ownership of their responses within and external to the interview experience suggests two specific conclusions. The first is that the task was socially validated sufficiently for the implicit biographical pact of trust to be paramount: each person wanted their version of events faithfully recorded in the interests of producing a factual end-document. Again, this observes the maxims of quality and relevance. I interpret this as participants backgrounding my own role with whatever gatekeeper perception there may have been, so that the joint co-operative exercise of commemorating the subject (however favourably or unfavourably) is prioritised. This of course includes ensuring that my version of the subject is not privileged over theirs.

The second conclusion is that for a diverse range of interviewees to be assertive to such a degree, there must be a link between cultural life writing literacy, the co-operative principle and context. In this case I would advance the data as evidence of the particularly empowering conditions operative under the Anglosphere specific to the Australian experience, in the general context of democratised biography. The fact that interviewees were able to articulate face needs within the context of a socially normative process or “ritual order” of interactions is highly significant. The local, contextual negotiation of power differentials across gender, age, social status, and speech community (etc) within the linguistic transactions was both “intrinsic and circumstantial”.

The concept of Face is applicable in the reading of this interaction. Originally defined from latent cultural ideas of honour and face by Goffman in the 1960s, Face can be understood as: “Face-work (more closely defined as) analysis of ritual elements in social interaction”. Used as a central plank of DA theory, Face “may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself...Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social

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1 Grice (1975).
2 Goffman (1967:8).
attributes…as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion or himself1. A threat to Face is when other persons challenge an individual’s self-opinion or “showing” in a public interaction2. The negotiation of Face threats between individuals is reflective and causative of hierarchies, with the premise that established social order or “equilibrium” is also a social need, such that persons typically resist Face threats if these actions threaten overall social order3. Typically each person derives benefit from knowing their established position in the social order, so long as their Face needs are met4.

In the case of my research, Face threats were thus subsumed to the common need: especially since there is no legal requirement for participation. That is, each participant was able to obtain intrinsic and extrinsic benefit from being part of the task. Face needs were met, so that each person indicated comfort with the interviewing project and the role they understood that they had achieved for themselves. The benefits I would characterise as being part of the co-operative task, feeling validated and recognised in a public forum and document, but most importantly, having a relationship with the subject signalled as being their property. This is why I interpret participant utterances indicating ownership over the life writing process and product as signifying a resistance to “relinquishing ownership of memory”5. This in turn expresses a singularly powerful social statement signalling strident self-awareness, agential autonomy and individuality.

Further conclusions

Ownership of memory and the representation of that memory in the narrative of life writing has always been part of the biographer’s methodological dilemma, but there has never been an explicit acknowledgment of these concepts in the literature: “there is much to be learned about biography (since it) has not developed a ‘methodology’”6. Perhaps in the commentary on biography what not to do has dominated as a focus. Indeed, where memory is discussed at all it seems to be focused on the topic of its unreliability as a documentary source7. There has been tacit conceptual acceptance in the discussion of biographical trust8 and the duties of the biographer towards data data sources9, but no conceptualisation of the ‘rights’ of persons for whom the subject of a biography goes beyond mere casual interest; either as readership or as data contributors.

4 Goffman (1967).
5 My term.
7 Jolly (2001); Edel (1987); Hamilton (2008): primary documents are still, overall, considered as more reliable than oral testimony.
8 Lejeune (1989); McCooey (1996).
I wish to characterise these persons as interested persons, in that they have a legitimate or presumed interest in the biographical narrative. To demonstrate that these persons have always had a role in the biographer’s consciousness, we need look no further than the credentialing that accompanies the framing of the text. In what seems to be a pre-emptive move to assert narratorial authority, the biographer typically explains method and scholarship, usually in an introduction to the work, unless the publisher provides it (usually on the cover). Effectively the biographer asserts that they have produced a narrative which has depicted the subject, persons with whom that person had relationships, conversations, memories, events, even thoughts and motivations, comprehensively and objectively, and most commonly, truthfully. Standard examples include:

This is not a critical study of either (her) life or her career. It is, rather, as true an account of her life as I can present, based on countless hours of private conversations\(^1\).

I have tried to limit my role to that of an editor…a documentary…allowing the (documents) to unfold the narrative with a minimum of editorial interference…notwithstanding my own evident partiality for(his) writing, I have endeavoured to leave this account tolerably free of opinion and judgment\(^2\).

Nigel Hamilton has written prize-winning biographies of Field Marshall Montgomery and of J.F Kennedy (and) President Bill Clinton\(^3\).

Every other commercially published biography I have consulted attaches a similar credentialing of the author: to market the text, to persuade confidence and belief and to establish authorial trust. A more complex example is the “moving introduction and numerous annotations by Bryce Courtenay” which frame, permeate, promote and interrupt the narrative of Roy Kyle, who as a “mere private of the Great War” presumably needs a more famous author’s credentials to establish reader-trust\(^4\). It is obviously a necessary validation of the narrative; to foreground the author’s credentials is to assure the reader that the text- regardless of how many persons were consulted for data- that one person has generated a unitary, coherent, perhaps even teleological account of that particular life. What is absent from this credentialing is the transparency of method. There is typically a discussion of scholarship, and how the biographer negotiated documents and interested persons, but the selection process behind the negotiation of documents is not transparent:

Biographers who ‘let their subject speak for himself’...have strung together a series of excerpts from documents...the biographer who lets the reader do the biography...usually explains in his preface that he has not presumed to interpret the materials...these biographical

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1 Berg (2003: back cover).
3 Hamilton (2007: back cover).
‘dodges are disingenuous…the reader only knows as much as has been arranged for him to know'.

Biographers must undergo a monstrous accumulation of unprocessed detail, most of which will eventually be discarded…what appears in the book must never be more than the tip of the iceberg.

The task of balancing the literary-raconteur with the documentary-archive is not a new difficulty. What is new is the competing and increasingly strident scrutiny and power of interested persons over the biographer’s task. Just how this power is being manifested is critical to an understanding of the challenges facing the modern biographer. The emotional, psychological and social ties from interested persons to the subject, as manifested by the attachment to memory and relationships in the practice of life writing, are products of a society where the rights of the individual are foregrounded more than ever before. The stridency of opinion as expressed by interested persons displays an empowerment probably never before seen in history at such a level: “Today we in the Western world value individuality as never before-perhaps as a result of two seismic world wars fought against totalitarian ideologies that assigned no importance to the individual”.

War, social change and empowerment of the individual life

While acknowledging the merits of such an impetus for social change and individual empowerment, I would argue that there are singular precedents for such social change, such that the late 20th Century post-war environment builds on cumulative, and particularly Anglosphere responses. It has been suggested that this modern interest in the personal narrative developed from the reaction of a generation exposed to the horrors of World War I, where histories arose to put the case of the enlisted men. Most of these published historical accounts deal with the realities of trench warfare on the personal level, as opposed to the propaganda “written by high-ranking officers, historians and military experts” which presented a nationalistic veneer or overview.

This generational experience coincided with a demonstrable, dramatic shift in social structure, caused by a wholesale generational disillusionment in the aftermath of the bloodiest war in history to that time. In countries such as the United Kingdom, where the impact was felt throughout society, this was especially the case, while in Germany or Russia social pressures suppressed dissent. This social change accelerated in the West after World War II.

4 Hamilton (2007:10).
6 Bryce Courtenay in Kyle (2003:5).
9 Smith (1986:208-229).
However, even more importantly, both World Wars radically altered public perceptions in the West on issues such as nationalism, democratic participation and individual rights: “the change, then, is not in basic structures but in ideas and in social attitudes and relationships, in how people and classes saw each other, and, most important, in how they saw themselves”\(^1\). The nature of writing after World War II was increasingly introspective\(^2\), and some researchers see the immediate post-war period as the time when the truly modern, mass produced biography emerged: “since the 1950s the art of biography has burgeoned, and biography has become a major publishing industry”\(^3\). The major shift in theme in all this writing was away from the ideology of conflict, to the personal experience of those who had survived war. From this time biography fostered many personal accounts, including the stories of non-combatants, such as Holocaust survivors: “what emerged as contested and unsettling was that this total war...created a new kind of victim who remained beyond the Allies’ war aims and strategies”\(^4\).

I would argue, however that such an evolution began much earlier. There was a significant precursor to current trends in biography with the first ‘modern’ war: the American Civil War\(^5\). Many theorists have ignored the legacy of this war in the modern psyche in the United States, and thus have overlooked its effect on the modern biographical phenomenon in general. For instance, to say that: “a substantial proportion of the twentieth-century social experience has been consumed by war”\(^6\) ignores any impact on Western society as a result of the US Civil War when it seeded many social movements internationally\(^7\). Not only was 1860s America highly industrialised, populous, democratic and powerful by international standards, it was also “perhaps the most literate nation on earth”\(^8\). This literacy included readership and production of life writing. Consequently, as with other, later ‘total’ wars, it also generated the first wave of ‘modern’ biographies, some fifty years before Strachey was considered to have invented the style\(^9\). These biographies were written by literally hundreds of soldiers, prisoners of war, freed slaves and civilians who had seen the “real” war, and who felt an urge to tell their story, to “set the record straight”: they “promised to tell the truth, assuring readers that they described experiences in honest, ‘unvarnished’ prose”\(^10\). This was in response to the ‘official’ accounts of the conflict which sought to define it in political ways, and about which Walt Whitman declared: “the real war will never get in the books”\(^11\). An entire publishing industry developed in

\(^1\) Marwick (1976:159).
\(^2\) Jolly (2001:963-5).
\(^3\) Cuddon (1998: 85).
\(^4\) Jolly (2001:963-5).
\(^5\) Following Beckett’s definitions (1989:26-8) criteria include: mass volunteer armies; trench warfare; modern weaponry including torpedoes, mechanised armour, aerial craft (balloons); civilian participation directly and in mobilised industry in a ‘total’ war effort; more Americans died in the Civil War than in all other wars involving the USA combined. See Ward (1998:39, 77,124-5,313).
the United States to cater for the “astonishingly rich and moving record of what they saw and felt…the voluminous writings of those witnesses”\(^1\). The popularity of these published accounts, complemented in most cases with photographic illustrations, obviously found a curious and literate public readership: “every returned (man) has brought his tale of suffering, astonishing his neighbourhood with accounts of cruelty and barbarity…Innumerable narratives have been published”\(^2\). In many other cases, families retained war diaries and memorabilia, making the American Civil War the most documented conflict to that time\(^3\). From the legacy of these published accounts and other ‘domestic’ sources, a major US television series was produced: *The Civil War*\(^4\). The director of that series made a conscious decision to relate the “untold story”, or the war as experienced by thousands of “ordinary people”, rather than a traditional overview. In doing so, he makes the distinction between official history and his form of social history:

> Historians delight in telling us what our history is and what it means. The historical documentarian, on the other hand…delights in recording and conveying [that] people looked like this, or sounded like that, or felt these ways about such things…[it] is often more emotional and more immediate...because of its continual joy in making the past present through visual and verbal documents\(^5\).

In the light of this precursor to the late 20\(^{th}\) century boom in biography, it would appear, then, that we are returning to the concept of popular control over narrative in recent times, spurred by conflicts that involve a substantial proportion of the civilian population. Similarly, a case could be made for a revival in social awareness following the Vietnam War, since it also involved large-scale participation and protest\(^6\). Clearly many movements, including women’s rights and African American rights, were already in motion, but were stimulated by the same forces that aroused interest in biography’. It is certainly not coincidental that the most dramatic surge in biography dates from the 1980s, as already noted, and this therefore places it in the context of the immediate post-Vietnam War period. A common thread linking all these conflicts and their attendant surges in biographical writing seems to be a communal act of rebellion against authoritarian writing of history, when the reality of ‘ordinary’ people’s lived experience is absent from the official texts\(^8\).

The rise of social history is linked to the rise in life writing\(^9\). Social history encompasses the range of record keeping by members of the public. There is a wealth of documentation at the local level: “Many people can write good


\(^{4}\) *PBS* Television series (1990, Ken Burns director).

\(^{5}\) Ward (1998:xvii). Burns’ term, the ‘historical documentarian’ refers to a specialised branch of social history; history retold for the medium of television or film via ‘documentaries’.


\(^{7}\) A good discussion of the links between war and feminism is Smith (1986).

\(^{8}\) An excellent discussion of an ANZAC soldier rejecting the ‘official’ narrative is in Alistair Thomson’s analysis of memory selectivity: Darian-Smith & Hamilton (1997:158-172).

\(^{9}\) Jolly (2001); Hamilton (2007).
history who are not academic or professional historians…they should write, even if not for publication, because they best know the significance of the material they have collected\textsuperscript{1}. It is an ‘underground’, or informal movement which has become mainstream and it represents a voice for the traditionally voiceless in society. The link from social history to biography should be apparent in this context: public recognition ennobles the life experience of these subjects\textsuperscript{2}. Social history, which aims at recording the fullness of ‘ordinary’ people’s lives, thus draws on biography, and inspires it. Both biography and social history seek to record and find meaning within lives lived: “individuals are constituted as texts”\textsuperscript{3}. That is why we see as a product of social history the re-emergence of the oral tradition, where witnesses, regardless of their social standing, are called on, and given authority as valid, reliable and independent narrators. It is perhaps a reincarnation of the original historical means of communicating an understanding of events in a social framework:

For historians, despite the long-standing existence of oral testimonies within traditional written records, the emergence of ‘oral history’ as a new methodology since the 1960s is central to understanding the emergence of social memory…the practice of recovering the voice of those previously hidden from history…popular memory was assumed to be (the process of) keeping alive pasts that history obliterated\textsuperscript{4}.

The empowerment of witnesses through oral testimony and social history is a feature of this strident individualism. This argues for a latent, even suppressed individualism tied to life writing which erupts under certain facilitative conditions; which the late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century has in more abundance than any previous era in human history. The idea of recovering those previously hidden from history can be extended beyond the subject of life writing to the interested persons surrounding that person’s life, and it seems that increasingly these persons are intruding on the narrative.

There are good reasons for this event. Assuming that the democratisation of biography is indeed a by-product of other social forces, the readiness with which interested persons express opinions can be seen as a collision between face needs. The biographer, in asserting a superior knowledge of the subject\textsuperscript{5}, instigates a Face threatening act\textsuperscript{6} whereby the highly phatic-emotional needs or affect\textsuperscript{7} of the interested persons are devalued in a public setting. The increased readiness to challenge this authorial control has undermined the presupposition of the gatekeeper, normative position. Little wonder then, that psychobiography became popular as a strategy for

\textsuperscript{1} Dufty et al (1973:133).
\textsuperscript{2} McCooy (1996:3-5).
\textsuperscript{3} Hutch (1997:1).
\textsuperscript{4} Dufty et al (1973:14).
\textsuperscript{5} Batchelor (2003); Edel (1987).
\textsuperscript{6} Goffman (1967:12-21).
\textsuperscript{7} Malinowski (1926:296-336); Brown & Levinson (1987:36-41).
\textsuperscript{8} Using affect as defined by Spinoza via Deleuze and taken up as philosophical conception and applied in DA and social theory: Stanford (2008).
“aggressive face threatening acts”\(^1\), by delivering increased credentials to the biographer, and thus outmanoeuvring the (assumed) relatively under-qualified readership/interested persons. The biographer gains face at the expense of interested persons, who normally are required to submit, regardless of how much they might approve of the narrative. The fact that interested persons appear to be less compliant for the normative discourse of the gatekeeper biographer is highly significant.

This is backed up by biographers who comment on the level of interference or external pressure from interested persons, usually framed in emotional terms. One prominent recent example is the yet to be published autobiography of the celebrity Jerry Hall, which has been reportedly delayed by serious omissions in deference to her ex-husband Mick Jagger:

WHEN Jerry Hall signed a deal with publisher HarperCollins to pen a tell-all autobiography, with particular reference to her nine-year relationship with Rolling Stone Mick Jagger, it promised to be an explosive read…one of the publishing sensations of the year. However, when the manuscript was delivered… it wasn’t nearly explosive enough and was rejected as unfit for publication. (Hall) even faces the prospect of having to return her £500,000 advance…her agent was busy trying to find someone to ghostwrite the book for Jerry in double quick time to get it out for a planned September 2009 publication date. The main problem with the manuscript is that it is terrifically bland.\(^2\).

William Yang, the Australian multi-media artist, experienced similar interference when documenting the lives of his mother and her family. He describes the issues encountered:

My mother (would) give me disapproving looks. ‘What are you up to now?’ she would say. By then I had a reputation of being a trouble-maker as I had already written about the family, and been indiscreet in public too…after my mother’s death my elder sister took on the role of my mother and she guarded the photos…What are you going to do with them? I know you’re up to something\(^3\).

On the other hand, it is evident that the biographer still tends to enjoy some advantages when utilising the formal medium of life writing. In this forum, there is often a powerful discourse operative for the credibility of the published account, regardless of the comments from interested persons. For instance, the debate over the representation of actual persons in the television series Underbelly\(^4\) has revived a discussion over factuality in biographical drama. In this case, “Australia’s most successful television program launch ever”\(^5\) has has made a concession that omissions were made. One of the series’ writers commented that:

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\(^2\) Helliker (2009).
\(^3\) Yahp (1994:55-56).
\(^4\) Channel 9 (2009).
\(^5\) Ebroadcast (2009).
The one glaring omission is Tony Mokbel, and there is a very good story to tell about Tony Mokbel,"...But (Gawler) said considering Mokbel still has matters to be brought to court, that story couldn't be told yet. "Who knows when the actual sequel of Underbelly can be told".

By contrast, the son of Donald McKay was widely consulted at the time by various media outlets, including television current affairs shows to explain that the omissions were more serious than the writers claimed:

Paul Mackay has noticed several other Underbelly inventions, such as having his mother working in the family shop and showing a woman trying to seduce his father to compromise him. "I'm disappointed that the show went to air with a number of historical errors," Paul says. "The producers claim that these errors, most of which they were aware of before the program screened, help tell the essential truth. I can't see how the screening of events that never occurred help to tell a truth."

Various books published on the subject which enjoyed strong sales in their own right, and which are considered as being more factual, could not compete with the 2.5 million viewers who reportedly watched the series on its first night. This is where the "fable", marketed as reality, takes over from the historical text:

The new Underbelly television series, entertaining as it is, isn't telling it like it was. That wouldn't be so bad if they were up front and admitted they were embellishing, dramatising and just plain making bits up, but it is being promoted heavily as a true story...the program's makers appear to have ignored their own consultants, respected Melbourne journalists John Silvester and Andrew Rule. Their book, which covers the same topics... is dead accurate...generations of Australians too young to remember what really happened will have Underbelly's distorted version implanted in their minds.

Several other media reports also linked the show to major distortions at the time of its release. However, months later, it would appear that Moor's assessment is correct, in that the program continues and is being re-run with good ratings, while the media has lost interest in the discrepancies. The public perception, naturally, will be dominated by the dramatised, and inaccurate, textual form in isolation. In this example it appears that the media criticism, while favourable to the printed texts, has been largely ineffective in

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1 Herald Sun (12-11-2008).
2 Moor (24-2-2009). Moor has also published a careful analysis on the same topic: Moor (2009).
3 Ebroadcast (2009).
4 Moor (24-2-2009).
5 Brown (16-2-2009); Knox (12-2-2009); Mitchell (17-2-2009); Area News (21-1-2009). Various syndicated media outlets based their reports on these commentators.
6 Channel 9 (2009).
7 There were no mainstream media articles on this subject after February 2009.
overturning the glamorised version. Interested persons, regardless of credentials, seem to have been ineffective against the tabloid-isation of biography. It remains to be seen whether the “fable” becomes “history”\(^1\), or whether the readership of life writing will be culturally literate enough to discriminate between the Capote-esque and lower-profile, more accurate versions of events. Either way, it is probable that some degree of residual historical damage or mythologising will remain fixed in the public domain, and will be difficult to dislodge.

Whether the established version of events in formal life writing can be overthrown at all is an interesting question. In the case of biographical texts where authority is attached to the best-known version, it is very difficult to dislodge its primacy as a perceived historical text. However, as will be seen, alternative views offered by interested persons, media scrutiny or by other formal texts present challenges which can sometimes achieve success in presenting greater historical accuracy, or at least an outcome more representative of the competing views of interested persons.

**Study 2: Challenges to formal biographies**

In order to study the efficacy of challenges to established biographical texts, I selected 90 formally produced biographical works depicting historical and contemporary subjects. The selection included synchronic, diachronic, autobiographical, biographical, scholarly, literary, novelistic and dramatic (including biopic) treatments of real subjects. Included were biographies on the same subject by different authors. I used a comparative historiographical thematic-DA analysis to establish the following:

1. If omissions were present in the text, and whether major or minor. Omissions are defined here as factual deletions, inventions or distortions which have significant bearing on the face needs of the author, subject or interested persons, as well as being demonstrably historically inaccurate in their own right.

2. If challenges exist external to the text from interested persons, critics or historians, and if these challenges were successful in overthrowing the validity of the established text. Success of challenge is defined as the replacement of the original narrative text by another which is more historically accurate, and which enjoys greater exposure and currency-readership acceptance\(^2\).

Findings:
In an analysis of 90 formally published biographies, there was evidence of minor to serious factual omissions in all texts. The slim majority were considered as exhibiting minor omissions. However, challenges to these texts were predictable along lines of factuality. Texts displaying minor omissions were either not challenged at all, or the challenges were insufficient to overthrow the primacy of the biographical text. Texts exhibiting major

\(^1\) Blanchett (2007).
\(^2\) A full list appears in Appendix C.
omissions, by comparison were predominantly challenged: but many of these challenges have been unsuccessful in overthrowing the original text. However this needs qualifying by category.

Table of challenge outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major omissions</th>
<th>Minor omissions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not challenged</td>
<td>not challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 (17)*: 12</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>Challenged</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
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* indicates 17 texts: novels, dramas (and “academy” life writing which is largely unread outside the academy-education systems, such as: Sartre, Eagleton, Greer, Proust, Joyce1).

The table shows the differences in success of challenge. The results were predictable by category. For instance, all texts in the category of minor omissions were consistent for the co-operative principle/biographical pact. These were omissions which were either inadvertent factual errors, or they were conscious errors and subjective treatments - but contextually and generically the author overtly alerted the reader to their presence. Texts where major omissions occurred have often been overthrown by challenges presented by other texts. A clear example of this is in the representation (two largely autobiographical texts), of Bob Hawke, which has been exposed as being dishonest in significant areas by the autobiography of his ex-wife. Significantly, one of Hawke’s texts appeared after his wife’s version of events, but it failed to restore any of his lost credibility, as indicated by weak sales. Other examples of texts overthrown by challenges are demonstrable cases of fraud (including libel) such as Norma Khouri, Helen Darville and Bob Ellis which were discredited by media investigations and legal challenges.

A special category of major omissions includes Shakespeare’s historical plays, which are based on real persons, but which cannot be construed as being either accurate or intentionally deceptive. Despite challenges in the form of alternative historical prosaic accounts have appeared since Shakespeare (e.g. Tranter’s MacBeth), it is safe to say that these plays occupy a position at the periphery of life writing where art dominates fact. There are two reasons why they are un-challengeable in this position. The first is because they are presented as historical drama and read as such: they are poetic, metaphorical, metaphysical, dramatic and, as tragedies, overtly teleological. It is clear that sufficient generic isolation exists for readers (and theatre-goers) to recognise that they are being positioned for historical drama which is not necessarily factual. However there is also the advantage of primary exposure. It is evident that for most people, their first and most salient introduction to figures such as Richard III, Julius Caesar or Macbeth will be

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1 Hamilton 2007 (247, 211-212).
through Shakespeare’s dramatisations, or perhaps dramatisations which are heavily influenced by Shakespeare. Either way, it is clear that the biographical depiction of these figures is heavily informed by the intertextuality which begins with Shakespeare.

A comparable case can be made for biopics generally, which adhere to linearity and present as dramas where the reader understands that licence is taken with dialogue and characterisations; but where the subject can still be read in various ways consistent with other (usually printed) versions of that life. However, in the case of La Vie en Rose, deliberate omissions and diachronics by the director are highly manipulative and at high variance from the printed versions of Edith Piaf’s life. It can be argued that a cultural literacy is operative for the reading of biopics, such that the reader is typically aware of artistic licence, but that, as in the case of Piaf, it requires extraordinarily powerful and widely disseminated alternative texts to overthrow the appeal and residual effects of filmic entertainment presenting as fact.

The same can be said for the life of Gough Whitlam, who has been the subject of 18 print biographies; but who continues to enjoy prominent social status as a result of highly successful marketing and/or mythologising through the party machine, media and academy. Two particularly critical biographies appeared shortly after his dismissal, but today and overall he seems to be remembered fondly, if at all, after 34 years. This may have been assisted by (his speech writer) Freudenberg’s (2) biographies of his “former boss”, both of which tend to the monumental, and which outsold all others. This helps to explain why one of his more critical biographers, Laurie Oakes, notes: “Labor’s 92-year-old folk hero is such a loveable, great-grandfatherly figure these days, and his period in office was so long ago, that most Australian voters remember little about the Whitlam government.”

Conclusions:
This study confirms that a high cultural literacy is operative in the readership of biographies. This is qualified by the degree to which this readership is exposed to alternative texts beyond the primary biographical text, but the readership exhibits not only a tolerance of subjectivity where that subjectivity is declared upfront by the author; but also an ability to discriminate for generic specificity along the lines of artistic licence versus factuality. There is in this literacy an ability to read a text for degrees of invention which seems to be an informed and healthy scepticism. Of course this literacy is informed by the accessibility of, and exposure to alternative voices which enjoy the same prominence as the unitary, primary narrative. In some cases, the lack of heteroglossia leaves the reader, however culturally literate, with a flawed, incomplete understanding of the subject. In many ways the strength of a free press manages to supply this heteroglossia.

1 National Archives of Australia (nd).
3 Oakes (1976) and Walter (1980).
5 National Archives of Australia (nd); Oakes, in The Daily Telegraph (30-5-2009:p24).
Media scrutiny as ‘public defender’

At the risk of ennobling the much-maligned media in the Anglosphere, it must be said that a vibrant press and a strident critical tradition, with its intensive scrutiny of life writing, can overcome much of the advantage enjoyed by a privileged biographical text. Indeed it appears that the Anglosphere press seems not only to have an historical continuity, but also a renewed impetus in this role, with the exponential increase in invited reader-viewer contributions. It seems that any depiction of a life in print or film invites an unprecedented amount of amateur sleuthing and historianship, with the active encouragement of journalists. The result is that there has developed a limited concept of partnership between the media and the public in overturning biographical deception.

In perhaps a bizarre example recently the ‘biography’ of a cinematic chimpanzee made headlines for being largely concocted, after an investigative reporter invited blog contributors to become involved. The result was that a lucrative celebrity mini-industry built around the spectacular “career” of a famous film animal was unravelled:

A writer’s research has exposed flaws in the story of Cheeta, the movie star chimpanzee famed for appearing in a dozen Tarzan films…whether all (of the celebrity biography) was pitiful or riveting, it would make for a spectacular book. If only it were true.

It seems even the trust implicit in a celebrity animal’s biography is accountable to its readers for factuality. Indeed, this is referred to in the author’s conclusion:

Because so many of the people whose stories could potentially have unraveled Cheeta’s confusing tale have passed away, the absolute truth is unlikely to ever come to light. As the updated bio on Cheeta’s website reads, "This will almost certainly remain a Hollywood mystery".

In the tradition of media exposés such as Kernot, Khouri, Darville and Ellis, where a critical-publisher or political relationship (or silence) is overturned by media investigations, another recent life writing scandal surfaced after documents became public. In this case, the widowed poet Judith Wright was exposed as having had a long-standing affair with a married political figure, Dr Herbert Coombs. It was clearly known to “Canberra’s intelligentsia” but the literary and political establishments of “the inner circle and the Canberra elite

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1 Limited given the media complicity in framing favoured political candidates and celebrity, generating “moral panics” and undermining those it disapproves of, as well as the dubious media elements which are stylistically and discursively linked to Creative Non Fiction. There is also the suspicion of vested interest in media portrayals overall, given the opaqueness of revenue and intermedia ownership.
2 Bennett (2007).
3 Los Angeles Times (2009).
4 Los Angeles Times (2009).
5 The Sydney Morning Herald (4-6-2009:p3).
kept the open secret for 25 years¹. Two biographers of Wright² also knew but
maintained silence under pressure from the subject:

There were parts of her life that I wasn’t allowed to speak of...Judith had a sense of propriety, she worried for Nugget’s reputation. It’s her life and not mine; I’m sort of her servant. I was too much of her admirer³.

No-one wrote about it...I said ‘how should I describe your relationship with Nugget? Because I knew she didn’t want it referred to as a love affair. She said, ‘just call him a dear friend’⁴.

Apart from the ethical and methodological issues of subject-authorial control, the fact that the affair became public through media reporting indicates two items. The first is the agreed silence between members of the political-academic-literary establishment, and the second is the eventual reporting of this conspiratorial silence through the media. An academic biographer describing herself as the servant of the subject via the media seems contradictory, but it also indicates the power of the media wherein such admissions can be made publicly.

Perhaps the most famous case of high profile biography being overturned by media scrutiny was the intense interest in Bill Clinton’s presidential affairs, both financial and sexual⁵. Within a few months of Clinton’s autobiography appearing in 1995, the US press began an investigative campaign which ultimately and directly led to impeachment proceedings⁶. Needless to say, the biography’s silence on Clinton’s extra-marital activities was exposed as a form of dishonesty. Further, the presidential race which Barack Obama won was noted for the intense media scrutiny of all candidates, although it could be argued that Hillary Clinton was severely handicapped by the public scandals involving her husband, which offered a residual, negative taint to her own biography. Indeed, it was argued that her “lack of reaction” in her follow-up autobiography in the wake of the scandals severely undermined her credibility and potential vote⁷.

On the other hand, clearly the political success of Barack Obama is due to his management of public representation. In addition to his articulative style, propositional content and rhetorical skill⁸ he has maintained control over his public face to a high level⁹. Various criticisms of the official versions of Obama’s life history have been given “air-time”, especially by his political

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1 The Sydney Morning Herald (4-6-2009:p3).
2 Veronica Brady (academic) and Fiona Capp (journalist).
3 Brady (8-6-2009).
4 The Sydney Morning Herald (4-6-2009:p3).
6 Leaders in the media campaign were Newsweek, the New York Times and CNN, as detailed in the timeline offered at CNN (1998).
7 Time Magazine (2008).
8 A skilled linguistic analysis is performed by Crystal (2008).
opponents, to eventually disappear without trace\(^1\). By the way in which these isolated voices have dispersed, it would appear in these cases that the mainstream media sensed correctly and made the correct judgements, not attaching any serious credibility to these allegations. It should also be noted that the actions of the subject, in choosing not to respond in most cases, while being measured and calm, perhaps even dismissive in other cases, largely accounts for the favourable outcome. It also appears that there has been no residual effect in this case, as with the Blagojevich scandal\(^2\), to which Obama’s name has been only tenuously linked:

Throughout his career, Mr. Obama has adroitly straddled the state’s bruising politics, forming alliances with some old-style politicians even as he pressed for ethics reform. But Mr. Obama had long been estranged from the governor, even though some in his political circle have had relationships with both of them\(^3\).

Obama presents an interesting case of power, given that he currently, and for some time, has operated from a position of social, economic, educational and political strength, while politically marketing his socially disadvantaged background and minority status. It is a clear example of cleverly managed biography which manipulates public sensitivity to issues of race, minorities, family breakdown and economic marginalisation\(^4\). In what could be described as pre-emptive control, it would appear that Obama is also “adroit” at editorially and personally managing his own representation in print, since he has been actively involved in a collaborative or consultative role for 7 of the 12 biographies published on his life; all of which appeared in the best seller lists during 2008\(^5\). Two of these biographies were retained by him as financial interests. This close management has paid dividends not only in the control over self-representation, but also financially:

U.S. President Barack Obama made nearly $2.5 million in 2008 from the sales of his two best-selling memoirs, according to tax information released by the White House... Obama... report(ed) an adjusted gross income of $2,656,902... Obama's books, "Dreams From My Father" and "The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream", were New York Times best-sellers and have sold hundreds of thousands of copies in the United States and around the world\(^6\).

This is a clear example of the pre-empowered\(^7\) person who, in managing their own representation, capitalises on other potentialities including media power, individual social status and political popularity. How much actual power can be exerted by interested persons in overturning the entrenched

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2. Coen (17-3-2010).
7. Carroll et al (1995:212). The context is different but the term is expressive of power prior to any particular contestation of power or expression of it.
authority of any given privileged text is contextual, after all other social
deterministic factors are considered. There is awareness of the power of
public representation in the behavioural sciences which is relevant to this
concept. A recent study investigates not only the manipulation of the media by
political and business leaders, but the impact of media representation on the
subjects' profiles as a type of response. It studies the: "reciprocal effects of
mass media—in this case, their impact on subjects of media reports,
especially on decision makers in areas of politics and business"\(^1\). The study
indicates that media portrayals of public figures are highly significant in
shaping public opinion and electoral-business success. To the entrenched
power of such a biographical text, any response will be subject to contextual
factors for any chance of success. However, there is one factor in the favour
of any person seeking redress or correction to the printed biography, which is
a firmly established social acceptance of the right to reply.

The right of reply defined for face, judicial, statutory, media and general
discursive application

The right of reply is a concept of codified linguistic self-defence which, while
arbitrary, nevertheless enjoys high uniformity, if not conformity, at the
conceptual-hypothetical level, across human societies\(^2\). It is more
sophisticated than simple physical defence mechanisms, although analogous
for the general notion of defence related to properties of self-esteem and
face\(^3\). Indeed, it is more properly understood as being operative at the
pragmatic level of consciousness, since it presupposes cognitive and
linguistic competence as a foundation of understanding\(^4\). That is, it is by
definition a reaction to a threat, as understood both linguistically and socially.
The threat constitutes a potential loss of reputation or status, integrity or
respect, as instigated by another's representation of the subject. The right of
reply, therefore can be understood as a discursive response to a tension
caused by a completely or partially, destabilising linguistic transaction, where
a public and/or interpersonal loss of equilibrium for face\(^5\) has occurred. The
tension requires a response, and the most predictable response is to seek
redress for a stasis restoration.

Frequently capitalised as a proper noun\(^6\), the right of reply operates as an
intact lexical item of contained sense both semantically and pragmatically. It
has conventional force, acting in concert with a powerful social norm wherein
control over self-representation is seen as a non-arbitrary and non-negotiable
entitlement. Typically it is expressed and implicitly understood as signifying
the need for equality before the law, for fairness in public and interpersonal
representation. It therefore includes the opportunity to control representation
of self in print or other public forums, and more especially where

\(^1\) Kepplinger (2007).
\(^2\) Pollis & Schwab (1980a:15); Khushalani claims human universality for this idea (1983:404).
\(^3\) Goffman (1967); Khushalani (1983).
\(^6\) Contexts include judicial systems and media codes of conduct.
representation has occurred to which response can feasibly be made as a form of correction or redress.

It is quite possible that there exists some ubiquitous, consistent human understanding of this entitlement, however inconsistently it is experienced\(^1\). Indeed, there has never really been consistency across societies for any recognisable notion of individual rights as articulated most tellingly in Western discourses contemporarily\(^2\). The difference could be summarised as being a contrast between entitlement and privilege, contingent on gender, ethnicity, age, status, social role (etc). The right over representation of self extends only to those persons categorised as having social standing in the first place, which is a concept of widely different applications in human society\(^3\).

Interestingly, the concept has its attractions, as indicated most recently by the judicial outcome in India for a member of the most unenfranchised caste of its society. The decision to extend autonomy or power over representation to the Untouchables\(^4\) was seen as contrary to previous judgements where these persons were not considered as having any social status, reputation or right to representation to have jeopardised, since it didn’t exist in the first place\(^5\). Three recent auto/biographies by members of this caste served to bring international attention to the plight of these persons in more than just a biographical context\(^6\). Indeed, the extension of real legal recognition-franchise to the Dalits has coincided with the political rise of one member of the caste currently launching a bid for the prime ministership of India\(^7\). Mayawati seems to have capitalised on the appeal rendered by a biography popular across her homeland and internationally:

"In India, politics is about empowerment and identity, governance," said Ajoy Bose, author of a political biography of Mayawati. "Many people feel she is of the people. That’s what matters most."\(^8\)

It is evident that a recognised right of reply now exists, however inconsistent in its application, across government and social policy in India where it once did not exist at all. Indeed, the very success politically of promoting a preemptive biography to ‘sell’ a candidate to the public in India is evidence not only of the power of life writing in a general sense, but also of the astute management of the right of reply in anticipation of its need. Whether it is derivative as part of the post-British colonial environment\(^9\), or whether it is

\(^1\) Khushalani (1983).
\(^2\) Donnelly (2003:24-89)
\(^3\) This is most thoroughly explored in the Sociolinguistic sense of entitlements and rights vs. privilege in political self-determination, linguistic rights for ethnic minorities (etc): May (2001:10-15). The link to self-representation in biography as a right or privilege has not been made yet in the literature.
\(^4\) Samatha India (2009).
\(^5\) This is an assessment of the social reality for 160 million people. Political-social-caste equality as official government social policy has existed since 1948, although it has largely been a social fiction for 60 years: Samatha India (2009).
\(^6\) Tartakov (2002).
\(^7\) The Times (2008).
\(^8\) Toronto Star (2009).
\(^9\) Warraq (2007) quotes many commentators to this effect.
reflective of more recent globalist trends in human rights, and the utility of biography in the marketing of political candidates is perhaps irrelevant. Mayawati’s political success should be seen as building on the fundamental principle of control over representation of self, a mechanism which enjoys popular appeal across class or caste. The right of reply is an integral component of this wider discourse. It is also a feature and application of the individualist tradition, attached to the modern experience of life writing.

It is uncertain how this concept extends to other societies, especially where the idea of fair representation can only be described as nascent or latent. Still, despite the sporadic application of this concept across human society historically and contemporarily, there is evidence for a growing uniformity of understanding globally for what the right to individual justice outcomes should be. It is possible logically, therefore to see that such discussion of individual human rights, wherever it occurs, is the entailment of a semantic presupposition. That is, the right of reply, variously expressed in other forms, is intertwined with all other notions of basic rights. It is, perhaps most importantly, often epitomised by the concept of restorative justice.

Under the Western adversarial judicial system, connected to the idea of justice and human rights under law, is the especially forensic notion of fair representation, where persons have the right to respond to another’s remarks or assertions regarding them. At the core of judicial procedure is the concept of representation as tied inextricably to consistency and equality across capital and class divisions:

An unbiased, universally applied procedure, whether it serves to distribute wealth or deliver decisions, (which) can ensure impartiality as well as consistency. The principle of consistency proposes that "the distinction of some versus others should reflect genuine aspects of personal identity rather than extraneous features of the differentiating mechanism itself." In other words, the institutional mechanism in question should treat like cases alike and ensure a level playing field for all parties.

It seems especially well understood as part of the legal process, where it appears in procedures and regulations for cross-examination, and in general “confrontational” testimony. The central concern seems to be safeguarding the rights of the individual. It is:

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2 The entailment of any propositional content, as expressed under semantic laws 1 and 2: Fromkin et al (2008). The semantic operation of logic provides evidence for a common human understanding of what justice actually entails at the individualist level.
3 Donnelly (2003:24-89) elaborates on this idea, but asserts that the consciousness of human rights anciently and contemporarily should be more accurately seen as a precursor to the modern, Euro-American “conception and practice”. Nevertheless, it is important to accept “awareness of need” as being foundationally analogous, however undeveloped it may be.
4 Maiiese (2003).
One of the fundamental guarantees of life and liberty...long deemed so essential for the due protection of life and liberty that it is guarded against legislative and judicial action by provisions in the Constitution of the United States and in the constitutions of most if not of all the States composing the Union.1

Particularly relevant is the notion of a right to self-representation at law or in public media and forums, although finding it definitively articulated as a statutory right as been, until relatively recently, unusual.2 There is the understanding that an individual is entitled to fair representation as both a linguistic and judicial right, such that the defendant must be: “physically and linguistically present”4. It could be argued that a right of reply is especially well-established in the Anglosphere, since it seems to be a ready assumption, and typically inferential, underlying much in institutional, procedural and public practice and attitudes. Nevertheless, some degree of acceptance for the concept seems to be increasingly operative in the international community, where the right of reply could even be seen as a fundamental human right. It is, for instance, both inferential and explicit in many articles as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights5, to which the majority of the world’s nations are signatories.6 It is also clearly articulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights7.

In addition, various forms of defamation law which pre-existed the UN Declaration, exist already to a high degree in many English-speaking countries. Beyond this type of legal protection as a civil law right, or in societies where such legal tradition has little or no precedent, the growing recognition of a statutory silence has seen legislation developed over the past decade in connection with but also independent of various human rights movements. This has been codified in statutory form as protection against misrepresentation in parliament or in the press, most recently and notably, in many European states8, Indonesia9, the Philippines10, and in various Australian State parliaments. It has not been adopted, in Australia, at the Commonwealth level, however.11 Under state law, the right of reply has been specifically framed to protect citizens against misrepresentation in Parliament:

Its role is to put the applicant "in the same position as if he or she had been able to participate in the House", that is, “if the applicant had been a

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1 Cornell University Law School (2000).
2 Maddigan (2007).
5 UN Human Rights Council (2006).
6 However inconsistently the articles are actually applied domestically by the signatory nations is a different matter, of course, but the acknowledgment of a normative quality internationally is a fundamental step. Interestingly, the UN Declaration on Human Rights is the most translated document ever produced by the UN (UNHCHR:2009).
8 Jempson (2005).
10 Senate of the Philippines (2008).
11 Parliament of South Australia (2008); Bonney (1996); Maddigan (2007); Australian Press Council (2007).
member present in the debate, he or she could have rebutted the remarks"…covered by the Standing Orders of the House (where) that there has been an adverse impact on their reputation or in their dealings or associations with others or there has been an injury to the occupation, trade, office or financial credit or there has been an invasion of privacy.\(^1\)

Its variegated uptake amongst different nations is for complex reasons, and the presentation of such legislation in the aforementioned nations is significant for its historical contradictions. As has been asserted\(^2\) the perceived need for such legislation is most pronounced where human rights are discursively tied to only recently developing social awareness. Interestingly, where a common or civil law tradition is strongest, the uptake of specific human rights legislation is not considered a priority. For instance, it has not been legislated for in Australia or the USA\(^3\). In response to agitation for specific legislation by the Australian Human Rights Commission\(^4\), a former Premier of NSW has commented on the motivation of those behind the unnecessary level of duplication of protection being recommended:

The 1988 referendum was voted against by Australians…citizens knew that Australia was one of the freest countries in the world and that we wouldn’t make ourselves freer by inventing new offences…(I) suspect someone’s on a mission to find a bigger role for himself.\(^5\)

In the USA, the unresolved conflict over the notion of freedom of expression versus individual rights to control over representation has seen the debate move into various categorical Federal-State jurisdictional legal controversies, without an apparent end in sight.\(^6\) In the US, the debate has been tested in the state and federal legal systems, where the idea has been termed the “Fairness Doctrine”, a concept of admittedly moral stature, but a concept which has been ultimately determined as a “principle without regulatory weight”\(^7\). Interestingly, the right of reply is, by contrast, more regulated in the West outside the Anglosphere, where defamation laws already exist to protect the individual.\(^8\) This difference perhaps indicates a political and social tradition tradition less familiar with the concept\(^9\) and a less sophisticated media, social

\(^1\) Maddigan (2007).
\(^2\) Maddigan (2007).
\(^3\) The UK has only recently ratified a Bill of Rights. The arguments for appear in Robertson (2009).
\(^4\) This current federal inquiry has the specific framework of religious freedoms, with reference to right of reply and protection: it assumes a link to the UNHCHR and the right of redress against religious vilification.
\(^5\) Carr (18-4-2009). The reference is to Robertson.
\(^6\) This includes the idea of a bill of Human Rights, which is not the same as the rights outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution (Drechsel:2009).
\(^7\) Drechsel (2009).
\(^8\) This is admitted by Robertson (2009); who nevertheless argues that the implicit understanding is vibrant but limited. It contains too many loopholes and un-codified “dogma and cant”.
\(^9\) It is reported that the first legislated Right of Reply in Europe occurred in France (1881), but France’s record on rights and democracy is contextually flawed, so it indicates a different legal focus and the absence otherwise of civil entitlements: Jempson (2005); Martin & Adam (1994:790-794).
and democratic stability and continuity\(^1\). That is, a sophisticated understanding already exists in Anglosphere nations, where social practice indicates that there is less apparent need to legislate for any further defamation protection\(^2\). The various applications seem to be largely voluntary, voluntary, reliant upon a tradition of press autonomy and freedom, presumably effectively, in Australia, the USA and the UK\(^3\).

There is also some evidence for this in editorial statements of policy found in the Anglosphere media\(^4\). While it may be a difficult area to legislate, the mainstream Anglosphere media certainly seems to have voluntarily taken the concept seriously, with adequate editorial accountability foregrounded, offering fairness in coverage and a right of reply\(^5\):

When we make allegations of wrong doing, iniquity or incompetence or lay out a strong and damaging critique of an individual or institution the presumption is that those criticised should be given a “right of reply”, that is, given a fair opportunity to respond to the allegations before transmission\(^6\).

The ‘right to reply’ is one of the basic rights recognized by the media, and is viewed as a proper form of ethical behavior\(^7\).

Given that the concept of the right of reply enjoys a diverse and even distribution across many core discursive applications through various societies, it seems odd then that the right of reply has not been codified in the literature to recognise the changing social reality within the discussion of life writing. Along with the admission of neglect for the readership of biography\(^8\), the right of reply should be seen as linked both in the non-attention given to it, and in its dialectical relationship to the theme of the readership of biography.

### Notions of fairness in the context of life writing

It has been said that the tradition of life writing in the Anglosphere has arrived at a highly codified and systematic structural and generic consistency\(^9\). This generic integrity and predictability have been achieved despite increasing attempts at undermining generic integrity. Indeed, as has been shown, this

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\(^1\) Martin & Adam (1994:792). The unresolved debate over Australia’s need for Human Rights legislation, like its counterpart in the USA, hinges on the capacity and extent of existing statutory legislation to achieve the same results.


\(^3\) Australian Press Council (2007).

\(^4\) The criticisms of the media, particularly in the theme of moral panics, is, has been discussed previously, vastly exaggerated. Overall, the media in the Anglosphere demonstrate transparency and accountability to high degree. Indeed, this topic will be evidenced in the ensuing discussion of media coverage of biography, which provides an invaluable resource for authorial scrutiny.

\(^5\) BBC (2009); SMH (2009); NYT (2009).

\(^6\) BBC (2009).

\(^7\) Lehman & Limor (2009); spelling retained.

\(^8\) Jolly (2008).

\(^9\) Jolly (2001); Hamilton (2007); Batchelor (2003).
trend towards generic subversion is led and almost entirely contained within the TPMA. There is, beyond the TPMA and in the wider community, a remarkably stable consensus for what constitutes conventional life writing. Life writing also relies upon a highly developed sense of self and individual entitlements and rights for its very existence, which conditions are met in the Anglosphere. However, absent in the wider life writing literature is any discussion of the rights of persons depicted, or of interested persons beyond the subject. There is an implicit reference to such concepts in the biographical pact of trust and in general discussions of historiography-methodology, but this is depersonalised as a professional obligation to the “testimony…sources” or the “documentary raw materials”. This indicates that, outside of legal or relationship concerns, there is nothing binding for the biographer. Nor is there a code of ethics for biographers. There even seems to be a marketing edge in proclaiming the biography to be “unauthorised.” In my biographical research participants were asked to sign a consent form for the material they submitted, but as biographer I was taken on trust (mostly). The idea of trust is indeed central to the biographer’s task:

The biographer is an artist on oath, meaning a writer with integrity… a trust (or) compact between yourself and your audience is essential…constantly reminding yourself to respect your audience and earn its trust is a strategy that will never fail…so that the reader will credit what you are saying.

This idea of the biographer standing behind, or being accountable for their work approaches the idea of fairness, an elusive but powerful idea that permeates life writing. Support for a type of universality in the notion of fairness in representation occurs at the discursive level. Truth-sincerity conditions, felicity conditions and notions of face are accommodative for the idea that representation, whether of self or of others, must adhere to factuality and trust. The notion of fairness seems to be well understood as a concept across discourses, perhaps in the same way that the right of reply has become well established across cultures in the modern context. It seems axiomatic to say that people:

Believe that justice consists of rules common to all humanity that emerge out of some sort of consensus. This sort of justice is often thought of as something higher than a society’s legal system. It is in those cases where an action seems to violate some universal rule of conduct that we are likely to call it “unjust.”

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1 Lejeune (1989); McCooey (1996).
5 See Time Magazine (2008) for featured unauthorised biographies on Hillary Clinton; or Watson (2002) who prefaces his biography of Keating by stating that he did not have the subject’s co-operation or approval.
7 Maiese (2003).
In its narrower sense, justice is fairness. It is action that pays due regard to the proper interests, property, and safety of one's fellows\(^1\).

Yet upon closer inspection it is all too evident that without some clarification, the concept remains entirely arbitrary and singular, subject to diverse interpretation, however conventional its social force as a conceptual contract:

People often frame justice issues in terms of fairness and invoke principles of justice and fairness to explain their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their state or government\(^2\).

It is widely accepted, however, that social and distributive notions of justice relate to not only economic and capital equality, but also to interpersonal relations:

Some have suggested that equity, equality, and need are not principles adopted for their own sake but rather ones endorsed to advance some social goal. For example, while equity tends to foster productivity, principles of equality and need tend to stress the importance of positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging among society members\(^3\).

Not surprisingly, each of the principles of justice and fairness can be applied in a variety of contexts... (we should) understand conflict in terms of tension that arises between the different justice principles. Conflict about what is just might be expressed as conflict about which principle of justice should be applied in a given situation or how that principle should be implemented\(^4\).

The extension of equality to include notions of parity in relationships, both interpersonal and as a constituent of social place and belonging, is significant for the discussion of biography. Given that life writing is definable by its representation of a subject’s relationships and belonging, as well as the chronology of a life, there is immediate application for the notion of justice in how this narrative is constructed. Logically then the “tension” between a resolution of justice according to well-established notions of fairness and the offence that has occurred against this conventional understanding of what each person is “entitled to”\(^5\), includes a representation of self by another where injustice is felt, as a result of that representation. Fairness, then, in the context of life writing, means that any person depicted in a biographical text, should be represented in a way which is both factual and amenable to control by that person. The difficulty with a biographical text is that its medium typically prevents a satisfaction of both aims since the author exerts ultimate control in a unitary and ultimately arbitrary manner. The formula that applies to biography is the greater the scholarship, presumably the greater the

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factuality; the greater the consultative process, the greater the fairness. Nevertheless, in reality, despite the general integrity of biographical scholars, there are still structural and discursive problems with the traditional biographical format. One of these is that there is no comparable admission of or forum for, dissent once the finished text appears in print. Even where the right of reply is accessible, there is no guarantee of its efficacy against the primary text.

Theoretical disadvantages of the right of reply

The judgement of fairness can be measured by proportionality: that is, the reach of any specific item of life writing has power which is contingent upon the number of persons exposed to it, and the authority attached to that type of exposure. Presumably the privileged, commercially, religiously or educationally produced text, which enjoys institutional, didactic and popular endorsement and exposure, can be weighted for greater social power. It is logical that a greater accountability for that power attends the wielding of it.

More recently, online media such as Facebook, twittering sites, Youtube and blogs\(^1\) have successfully negotiated this established privileged position of the traditional biographical text, relying instead on their advantages of anonymity, immediacy, currency and wider exposure-accessibility to extend their reach and penetration\(^2\). Nevertheless, while it has been argued that online media offer the potential for a greater participatory, interactive role, and even an enhanced democratic sense of entitlement, there is also the disadvantage of anonymity and guerrilla style attacks on personal reputations in an environment where immediacy and lack of institutional or personal accountability facilitates a breaking down of social protocols\(^3\).

This environment has, for instance, also given rise to the newer syndrome of cyber-bullying\(^4\), where a subject can be intimidated by groups of persons utilising the power of the internet to publish defamatory or embarrassing material\(^5\). The person responding to libel or character attacks published online is entirely disadvantaged by the guerrilla tactics\(^6\) of such representation. The power of such mis-representation is evident in the suicides attributed to cyber-bullying as documented in recent years:

QIT child psychologist Dr Marilyn Campbell said cyber bullying was a growing problem. She said 15 to 20 per cent of students experience some kind of cyber bullying. The Institute has completed a study into what has become a global problem. "We actually think that the consequences of cyber bullying could be even worse than normal schoolyard bullying, mainly because it is the power of the written word

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4. Yuritta (2009); Besley (nd).
we can read over and over,” Dr Campbell said. The consequences of cyber bullying can be fatal\(^1\).

Further studies have evidenced the incidence of cyber-bullying as occurring in the adult workplace and general social domains\(^2\). It could be argued, then, that whether responding to the physical or cyber text, the subject or other interested person is at the mercy of published life writing because it occupies the initial textual instance. In his case, the difference between a cyber text and a published text, is that the online text is instant, changeable, fleeting and exhibits less responsibility for content. The commercially published text, in its enduring medium, typically offers a stasis of representation and enjoys greater vetting and social trust. It is feasible that as more digitalisation of institutions and texts occurs, the gap of credibility may narrow. It is also necessary to see the link between the cyber and traditional textual media in the context of life writing, which is that potentially any person can be on the receiving end of an adverse text in a high profile environment, to which reply is completely or proportionately ineffective.

There is a deterministic mechanism by which textual exposure manipulates biography. It is certain overall that the public face of any person represented textually experiences some impact, or effect, from the reading of that text by people who may or may not have any prior knowledge of the person so represented. This is true regardless of the biographical textual variables: such as whether that person is represented, either with personal editorial control or without any personal voice; in an online text or a traditionally published text; transiently or permanently; with wide or minimal exposure.

Biography in particular is perhaps the most significant of all textual personal representations, as it designed to be conducted in the public arena. However, in the academic literature there still does not seem to be any awareness of the power of biography as a formative text in the shaping of public opinion. It is simply not good enough to disregard the impact of any text which seeks to represent a person, since there are direct and/or residual effects on the discourse of the reader from the decoding of a text\(^3\), and this process is irreversible\(^4\). So much is admitted in literary theory\(^5\), yet the literature on biography has all but ignored the potential of such intertextuality which is occurring either subconsciously or consciously in the minds of readers of biography. The practical exercise of every instance of readership of biography, or the cumulative decoding of life writing texts, therefore should be regarded as being highly significant to any understanding of biography as theory or practice, in production or in effects upon readership. The significance extends beyond the mere extent of public exposure that the original text sustains, but rather the discrepancy between it and the media with which a response is made. That is, context is critical for actual outcome. For instance, a front page article in a major newspaper or a commercially

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\(^1\) Quist (2008).
\(^3\) Wright (2007:14-18).
\(^4\) This is the essence of the concept of intertextuality (Bakhtin:1986).
successful biography cannot be matched for discursive effect by an official retraction/correction published in small type on a 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 5\textsuperscript{th} or 45\textsuperscript{th} page in a later edition of the same newspaper. In a more general sense, secondary information or a response is conditioned by primary information for truth conditions in any semantic-level linguistic equation which is operative on the schemata\textsuperscript{1}. At the pragmatic level, the differential is potentially much greater.

This is acknowledged tacitly by the very existence and social functions of the industry operating to systematically and professionally manage the profile of public figures. A person with access to such highly organised social manipulation will typically enjoy advantages beyond those of the average biographical subject. By contrast, the person without recourse to “high profile correction” or “spin doctoring”\textsuperscript{2} or “damage control”\textsuperscript{3}, will inevitably be at the mercy of whatever is said about them in media beyond their control. It should be even more certain that the person represented in a text, without the means to counter that textual reference to any degree comparable to the exposure of that particular, initial text, is at an even greater disadvantage. By extension, it is then logical to assume that other persons, who have an interest in another person’s representation, but who are similarly excluded from having their voices heard, will be even further removed from any means of correction or redress of textual representation. I would like to argue, then, that since biography enjoys great social prominence, and is otherwise such an important and influential popular medium of expression, it is also clear that any person relying on life writing in its parallel, even shadow forms, as a medium of reply, typically occupies the space or status of an obscured, silenced person remote from power sharing. It is a clear example of a textual silence\textsuperscript{4}, but extended in real practice because silence is not merely an absence, but also present in a misrepresentation. Further, I would argue that textual silence can be measured not only by whether the person is represented at all, but the extent to which they manage their own representation.

Therefore, while it can be argued that powerful social norms exist for the right of reply, for fair representation and equitable treatment in the public arena, it could just as easily be argued that, at least theoretically, the person responding to allegations or to claims of biased representation suffers several disadvantages.

Therefore, the right of reply can be rearticulated as a private and/or public discursive response to a text which has already become a point of focus in public discussion. It can be seen that the initial text/utterance in any dialogue enjoys a status of primacy. Where that text is a commercially published biography, authored by an established academic, professional writer or journalist, there is an institutional power differential operative against any person seeking to undermine the established textual placement. There is after all, an advantage of the first linguistic transaction, especially when located in socially advantageous structural media such as the officially sanctioned text.

\textsuperscript{1} Tannen & Wallat (1987: 207).
\textsuperscript{2} Esser et al (2001).
\textsuperscript{3} Esser & D’Angelo (2003).
\textsuperscript{4} Bennett & Royle (2004).
to which notions of truth are attached, and to which the response is always referentially subordinate and negotiated by: “an utterance can be understood only by reference to a pattern of prior (utterances and) knowledge…negotiated in a particular interaction”\textsuperscript{1}.

The distinct disadvantages, therefore of the person responding to a published text can be summarized as: the disadvantage of secondary status temporally and spatially; the disadvantage of a rebuttal form which is associated with negativity and powerlessness; the disadvantage against a socially privileged and located exposure; the disadvantage of the public readership bias towards that primary form; the disadvantage of the peripheral medium in which the rebuttal often appears. Compounding any of these disadvantages is the relative status or power differential which seems predictable for any secondary text. It is likely that the initial text will appear because the author/subject has the social capital, resources and initiative favourable for the production of that text. Although there is always a high degree of crossover for both author and subject between these areas of production, it is obvious that the field of potential biographical subjects will always be narrow, deliberately, professionally, socially and ideologically elite. There is a default negative status for any person seeking to respond to a privileged text, and sometimes this includes the very subject of the text itself if the biography is unauthorized or if the subject is dead.

Qualifying this general principle is the idea that “context is everything”\textsuperscript{2}. While social commentators have concentrated purely on socially deterministic models of capital such as gender and status-social background, overall it has been shown to be vastly inadequate for real life exchanges\textsuperscript{3}. The reductionist model of theory looks only at the power differential and predictability for the outcome of what is essentially a contest of power involving credibility and social location, while DA has shown convincingly that social determiners are only part of any linguistic exchange\textsuperscript{4}.

Part of context, and part of social capital, is the ability for any one person to dominate any isolated linguistic exchange; even when social determiners are disadvantageous. What are missing from the literal exchange such as a biographical text are the non-verbs or Paralinguistics, but they may very well appear to advantage in any other medium of linguistic exchange\textsuperscript{5}. If we consider in isolation any literal exchange such as the published biography, we are effectively removing the essential components of prosody-Suprasegmentals, which by themselves can alter almost infinitely the intra-contextual elements, and which are most certainly critical in any verbal exchange\textsuperscript{6}. There is of course the possibility of public exposure through television, online media, radio or print media, where the components of non-verbal exchange become meaningful and contextualized, and these should be

\textsuperscript{1} Tannen & Wallatt (1987:207).
\textsuperscript{2} Yule (2008:21-22).
\textsuperscript{3} Tannen & Wallatt (1987); Hutchby (1996).
\textsuperscript{4} Habermas (1998).
\textsuperscript{5} Jaworski & Coupland (2006); Coulthard (1977).
\textsuperscript{6} Kreidler (2006).
considered on a case-by-case analysis. It is, unfortunately beyond the scope of this enquiry, but should be considered at least as meaningful “background information” upon which assessments are made for credibility and truthfulness in a speaker\(^1\).

There is, in this type of consideration, the idea of public awareness of social capital, however consciously it may be understood. It is certain, for instance, that if we consider as an equation of power and credibility the discursive-social power of an established, attractive, young female celebrity contesting the representation of self through public forums against the discursive-social power of an obscure, ex-partner; there is presumably a huge power differential which is invoked on her behalf. Additional to these considerations for the act of reply to textual authority and primacy, is the discursive disadvantage of negation, where the very act of denial brings unwanted, and presumably unwarranted, attention to the allegation itself\(^2\). Not only that, but there is also the credibility gap. When all other discursive differences are evenly weighted, the denial itself, which may understandably be vehemently framed, tends to belie the propositional content of the utterance. That is, it is usual for interlocutors to respond to the prosody of the denial rather than the actual denial itself. Once this disadvantage is acknowledged, public opinion can easily be swayed. A young woman making allegations of offence against a male public official may very well be judged as being a powerless victim, and thus engender sympathy. Her manner of reply may also be viewed as dubious- regardless of her honesty- and it will then be compounded by social differences of status, gender, age, race and other elements of power differentially, such that the denier may be seen as “shrill, inarticulate, pushy, dishonest or otherwise unreliable for testimony”\(^3\).

The same could be said for the target of biographical attack. The literary reference “The lady doth protest too much, methinks”\(^4\) borrowed from Shakespeare and more recognizable as a proverbial item, articulates the disadvantage suffered by the person whose reputation is under attack. That is, by denying and making public a defence of self, not only are the negative comments made more public, but the manner of defending self can be seen as exaggerated, thus encouraging suspicion of dishonesty, culpability or unreliability. In DA, it has been asserted that such a syndrome can be demonstrated as of permanent effect. Upon defending oneself from criticism, there is an effect of bringing attention to the manner of defence, such that the very allegations lodge residually in the minds of the interlocutors, many of whom may have been disinterested spectators, or even favourable, prior to the incident\(^5\). In the case of a person anticipating adverse criticism, and attempting to pre-empt the instance of allegations of whatever nature, there is also the danger of alerting others to these claims, and the negative effects of

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1. The discourse of court interpreting has made greater investigation of these non-verbal components: Hale (1995)(2007); Gibbons (1994).
these claims, through public admission or confession, when either the claims may never have eventuated, or they may have had minor public exposure overall.

**Actual outcomes for the right of reply as complex and variegated**

It must also be stated that actual effect is entirely situational-contextual and can vary for the extent of damage to a person’s reputation as an outcome. As seen previously, challenges to an established biographical text are predictable for success if major omissions can be identified and demonstrated as such by a viable alternative text. Typically ranged against any potential critic is the commercial biographer’s assertion of greater authority, objectivity, perspective, narrative ability, historical scholarship, experience, academic qualifications and general social status. It is no accident that most commercial biographers are chosen deliberately by publishers from members of academia, journalists or professional historians\(^1\). As seen previously, the commercial biography will ensure that its status is beyond reproach by including accompanying authorial credentials on dust jacket, in introduction, preface or foreword. Additional justification is also included within the narrative itself, usually in formidable notation, bibliography or editorial asides\(^2\).

That is why a general principle can be suggested which states that the enduring effects of public biography are often visible or measurable. As discussed previously, the residual esteem which still attaches to the biography of Mao, Che Guevara, Stalin and Castro for their respective cultural-discursive followings, is distinctive and significant for ideology, durability and imperviousness to criticism. George Washington and Kim Jong II would be further examples of the enduring nature of combined domestic political-social life writing where revisionism is not socially endorsed or permissible to any high degree\(^3\). Indeed, the link to powerful emotional, cultural, ideological, even religious or religious-style fervour is evidenced by the reaction to any criticism of these figures in their respective national discourses. Nevertheless, it can be argued that despite extensive historical biographical and philosophical-ideological argument constituting a form of reply to the official depiction of these figures, there is sustained adherence to the original biography in its role as truth and meaning-making in national identity. It is obviously difficult, if not impossible to dislodge the effects of an official textual lodgment firmly established over generations within national-cultural-ideological psyche. The right of reply, in these cases, seems to be of minimal intertextual power. Guevara, for instance, despite an absence of 40 years and substantial life writing debunking the mythmaking, is invoked perennially by means of his

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1 Hamilton (2008); Aurell (2006).
3 Note the triumphant treatment of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Suk under official North Korean life writing (KFA E-library:2007). A meaningful comparison could be made with the official US life writing dedicated to the teaching of Washington’s role as foundational national leader. While major differences exist, it is important to see the functionality of narratives of a leader’s life in the formation of national discourse.
appeal for a minimal biography, even to the point of iconic representation. It could be said that the less the Che-follower knows about the real Guevara, the greater the attachment to the T-shirt icon and his minimalistic biography.

The reference to icons is instructive. Traditional Christian treatments of Jesus Christ’s biography have recently been reinterpreted and decontextualised from a strictly religious framework and re-considered as merely other, albeit prominent, favourable assessments of a life. When viewed as an instance of life writing which subsequently enjoys a substantial religious following, there is a conclusion that the motivational purpose of the Gospel writers is purely and intentionally deterministic and causative of belief or faith. However well reasoned this argument is, there is another way of reading the initial biography of Christ, which is that it constitutes a primary text. All subsequent assessments of the primary biography, including Hamilton’s, can be seen as responses to this text, or replies to its discursive primacy. Indeed the biography of Christ is unique in its variegated readings and responses as an instance of historical life writing, given the amount of literature devoted to its enhancement, subversion, interpretation or overthrow. The Lives of the Saints as hagiographic writing and Confessions, which is often cited as the progenitor or model of introspective Western life writing, are both salient instances of life writing generated in direct response to the Christ biography, and they in turn generate other derivative genres of writing further removed from the original text. The sheer volume of literature and biography directly or inferentially traceable to the Gospel narratives of Christ, therefore, raises the question of just how integral the Christian biography is to the Western tradition of life writing overall, given the individualistic nature of much of this early tradition. The negative connotations contemporarily attached to the term hagiography, for instance, are directly traceable to the uses of life writing for the generation of faith in saints at the service of the Christ biography. Once merely a generic label, hagiography is now synonymous with mythmaking and poor scholarship.

It also seems inescapable that replies to the Christ biography inform contemporary versions of monotheism and political thought. For instance, Muslim, Jewish, political and secular-atheistic historical and philosophical assessments of Christian ideology and the Christ biography over the succeeding two millennia have presented narratives which could be reasonably classified as replies to the original Christ biography, since they all post-date the Gospels, and are produced in direct response to them. There

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1 Hollander (2007).
3 Christianity has 1.5 billion adherents. Judaism (14 million) and Islam (1.5 billion) as the other so-called monotheistic religions, both feature prominent although oppositional biographies of Christ: Encyclopaedia Britannica (2009).
4 Aelfric of Eynsham (10th Century AD) in Skeat (1966).
5 St Augustine (4th Century AD) in Adler (1996).
8 Christ is second only to Mohammed for life writing functionality in Islam, as its next greatest prophet. The binary biography is oppositional to the Christian narrative of course, for claims of divinity: Dawood (1990:2-3).
have been, in roughly historical order, responses which have produced: the Nicene Christ, the Muslim Jesus, the Jewish Jesus, the historical Jesus, the fictional Jesus, the cinematic Jesus, and the secular Jesus (etc.)

The success of these replies to the Christ biography is variegated but the very volume of production is intriguing for its global scale. Indeed, it can safely be said that the Christian narrative continues to divide as much as it unites, and it invites wholesale acceptance as much as it does revisionism, scorn or polemics. More perhaps than any other biography in history, the Christ biography continues to generate and inspire debate, rejection and belief, which in themselves are all expressions of readership and constitute replies.

On the other hand, the relatively short-lived success of Hitler’s biographical Mein Kampf, and Nazi portrayals of Jewish persons for didactic-propaganda modelling both indicate the possibility of replies systematically overthrowing and replacing generational and dynastic biography. Additional to the removal of official narratives, the post-war German and Austrian legal prohibitions on endorsing Nazi political rhetoric and Holocaust denial, for instance can be reclassified as replies to the potential, perceived or actual, power of the Hitler legacy and biography. Whether these prohibitions on life writing schemata can be considered as being successful, viable forms of reply, or merely an alternative, suppressive modelling of anti-anti-Semitism is debatable. That is, prohibition of a prior biography being promulgated is not necessarily successful unless it is replaced by a viable alternative system of biography.

One example of almost complete non-reply or lack of franchise is the newly published biography of the Australian mass murderer, Martin Bryant, which presents details of a person incarcerated in an institution for the criminally insane since 1996. Not only is Bryant unable, physically or mentally, to reply to his depiction, there are no interested persons of any close connection able (or willing) to speak for him. By contrast, the text has access to many interested persons in his victims and their families (for instance) and prominent documentary evidence in the public record. Nevertheless, while sound in its methodology, the subject himself is absent from, and silent within, his own biography to a high level. His taciturn-ness prior to his crimes and his social absence while yet alive now, mean that the depiction of Bryant is necessarily by default: he himself is “absent…mysterious…in a society in which he had no place.” He is unresponsive to his own mother, who also seems unable to offer any insights. In the biography there are no interviews by the authors with the subject himself, although there are reported conversations via psychiatrists, his mother, and other acquaintances. Of

2 Syme (1997); Murray (29-3-2006).
3 This is without detailing the several conspiracy websites, which purport to defend Bryant, but which lack substance. Although Carleen Bryant (his mother) is supposedly quoted in these sites, it is not substantiated. She is also consulted periodically, although typically in quotes from pre-existing texts, in the Wainwright & Totaro biography.
4 The Sydney Morning Herald (24-4-2009:p1).
5 Murray (29-3-2006).
6 A significant condition given that Bryant has no living friends: Wainwright & Totaro (2009:10-15).
course the appeal of such a deductive biography is triggered by a hermeneutic device: his very silence creates a vacuum of information whereby the reader’s curiosity is engaged. Its effectiveness is because the reconstruction of the subject is forensic and is, combined with the notoriety and shocking crimes perpetrated, deeply and ultimately enigmatic. There seems to be no possibility of any reply from the subject, either inside or outside the text, a condition which destabilizes the reader’s expectations of subject entitlements and fairness, despite his conviction as mass murderer.

A significant example of effective reply is the case of the former Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. In this case the parlous state of Hawke’s marriage was “an open secret” in Canberra, but publicly the media kept silent, until a rather celebrated public confession on national television in 1989. Interestingly, the media seemed to then give more sympathetic coverage to Hawke’s wife, especially as she publicly admitted to battling Alzheimer’s. She published her autobiography only 3 years later, shortly after her husband resigned from politics and they had divorced. In it she effectively buried what was left of his popularity by revealing very unflattering secrets of their life together. It is certain that Bob Hawke’s political life was waning, but it is also certain that previous efforts at overturning his self-representation had not had any success, while his wife’s credibility and popular sympathy outweighed his own. It is conceivable that she also avoided the dangers of being perceived as being bitter because she had remained loyal and stoic in the face of so much public humiliation. Almost single-handedly she succeeded in largely overthrowing his autobiographical silences and lies, completing and coinciding with the politician’s loss of public face.

A more colourful Australian political example from recent history is the controversy resulting from the public life and published biographies of Pauline Hanson. On several occasions, her exercise of the right of reply through the media, through supporters’ online resources and through her biographies, seemed to attract more than sufficient media and public attention for her version of events to be heard, or at least be given interpretive exposure. Ultimately it can be concluded that her efforts at self-defence were unconvincing, in that she failed to convince a predominantly sceptical public and probably only persuaded an already supportive following on any of the main controversial issues. It could also be argued that a distinct lack of credibility, based on the media’s intuitively discursive understanding of her naiveté, mediocre intelligence, low social background, and certainly her gender and ethnicity combined with her politically disingenuous ideology, undermined the opportunities afforded her by a public and media intrigued by the novelty of the rather unfortunate spectacle.

1 Bernstein (1983)
3 BBC magazine (4-8-2008)
4 Prominent coverage included all the major networks and a program on the ABC (Australian Story:2007)
5 Described as an independent politician, member and organiser of the One Nation party, as well as a “serial political candidate” (Oakes:2007).
6 abc.net (2004).
Another option available to the person wishing to manipulate the biographical discourse is to maintain a silence. Or in the case, of public figures such as Byron, Thackeray, George Eliot, T. S. Eliot and Auden, personal documents were destroyed by the subject “commanding that there be no biography.” A noted case of such control is J. D. Salinger who has “hoarded documents” and sued would-be biographers (and a recent imitator)2: “he was adamant that he would not allow a single word...indeed, he made sure certain that no one of any note or intimacy (such as his ex-wife) would co-operate”3.

These examples demonstrate that, although a great advantage lies with the articulate and strategic manipulation of the authorial voice, which is hard to subvert from its privileged position, it can be overcome. It remains to be seen how much the rise of informal life writing, together with social empowerment of the individual, can with the alliance of a compliant media overthrow the embedded power of the institutional biography. Regardless of the actual power (social, economic) exerted by interested persons, it is possible, perhaps even necessary, to recognize a moral obligation on the part of the biographer to respond to the legitimate concerns of interested persons. Indeed, in the “business of hurt”, or in the true spirit of biography, biographers need to take cognizance of interested persons, not out of pressure (legal or emotional), but because they can and should. How those interested persons are characterised, as threats, insignificant or simply other, is entirely instrumental in the biographical method, and will increasingly comprise a criterion on which to judge the merits of any biography.

**Interested persons: a closer definition**

Interested persons are defined as persons with whom a relationship to the biographical subject can be identified. Employing a metaphor, these persons operate and are located within concentric circles of relationship links4, where the biographical subject occupies the centre. The next circle is occupied by close intimacy and background ties as sustained relationships. Other circles consist of persons who are then tied to the persons in the inner circle, or to the subject with minimal relationship contacts. The outer circles are occupied by persons with casual interest or contact to any of these upper levels. These concentric circles should be considered as delineating hierarchical relationships with each other, as well as contact and relationship links. They can also be considered for levels of knowledge, emotion and memory; which are non-tangibles but vital to constructions of narrative. The biographer- even the autobiographer- should be treated as a moveable piece who functionally seeks to replicate the relationships and knowledge of these interested persons by “knowing” them vicariously. The readers of biography will also be drawn from somewhere among these categories, as interest in the subject

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2 *Telegraph* (1-6-2009).
3 Hamilton (2008:318-319).
4 The model is based on plexity diagrams, where the relationships are interwoven: Holmes (2008:184-191).
usually entails prior, motivated knowledge. Even though (potentially) initially disinterested, casual readers are a distinct, feasible category as well, since they obtain literacy and an emotional response, or interest, through the narrative.

The next level of interaction graphically represented in the circles is the degree to which persons cross over in biographical role and activity. That is, to what degree the interested person becomes a part of the biographical process in a multiplex way. This might simply be an increased understanding of other interested persons or the subject via the research or reading process. When consulted for the research and preparation of the biography the interested person becomes the data contributor. When active in the preparation of the manuscript for factual correction, correlation and stylistics, the interested person takes on the editorial function. It must be said that the standard biographical text will present a unitary voice, inclusive of, but editorialising for and selective of, direct quotes and submissions from the interested persons; and it remains fixed temporally, discursively and spatially. The heteroglossia of readings of the subject’s life as vested in interested persons remains external to the text and has a life of its own; it is also capable of evolution temporally, discursively and spatially.

It also seems unavoidable that interested persons are characterised as both a source for and a potential threat to, the biographer’s task. Unfortunately this means that interested persons are often relegated to the status of ‘other’ simply because they retain an abiding interest in the biographical subject. When undertaking research the biographer has a primary process of consultation or exclusion\(^1\), in which a decision is made as to exactly which persons and documentary evidence is deemed as relevant. With oral evidence data contributions must also be viewed as being active memories and relationships- even when the subject is no longer alive.

In the secondary process of consultation or exclusion a decision is made for the final selection process of data, which can be expressed as an ultimately arbitrary judgment over what stays and what goes. Criteria will include notions of truth, art, tact and privacy\(^2\). In both of these stages it is usually considered that for the purposes of producing a coherent narrative the biographer must exercise “omniscience”\(^3\) or final control over the material\(^4\). Emotional and intellectual copyright is therefore (theoretically) appropriated by the author and re-contextualised, fictionalised and re-encoded. It is filtration through authorial discourse, the “ethics of which are complex and challenging”\(^5\).

Naturally, when the narrative appears in its final form there are typically dissenters from among the data contributors. Some may feel that their opinions, experiences and relationship with the subject have been betrayed: this is a reaction that is also deeply emotionally experienced. This indicates of

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1 Hamilton (2008).
2 This corresponds to the historiographical principles established by Marwick (1989)(2001).
4 Hamilton (2008:112).
course a doubt over the very premise that memories can ever be truly relinquished, even when surrendered voluntarily in this way. This provides evidence for the concept of parallel narratives: ownership of memory and relationship remain the property of the contributor and yet they are also extant in the biographer’s version of events. Perhaps unsurprisingly these dual narratives are often contradictory. A famous example was the controversy excited by Alvarez’s “sensitive, compassionate, elegiac memoir” with its highly detailed and personal reaction to seeing Sylvia Plath’s suicided corpse\(^1\). The resultant furore lasted for years, led by Ted Hughes, who sought control over the narrative of Plath’s life and death as a way of silencing competing discourses and memories “with near impunity”\(^2\).

Unfortunately for data contributors- if consulted and quoted accurately, and therefore with no legal recourse to correcting the published account- once the commercial narrative appears in print and in the public domain, the right of reply is severely disadvantaged. The very existence of the commercial biography carries enormous normative and capital weight. This will include a hierarchy of biographical narratives: authorial status, gender, age, ability, exposure, reach and the social construction of credibility through the medium of a publishing house and the product itself.

**The new biographer’s dilemma**

If there is a new dilemma for the modern biographer, it is relative to the old dilemma/s, in this case as articulated by Edel\(^3\). He identified several issues relating to methodology, primarily for documentary evidence, but could not have foreseen the material negotiation required of the contemporary biographer who faces a new context with vastly different social frameworks. It would appear that the task of a biographer contemporarily is more problematic than at any time previously.

The nature of Biography itself as a cultural and social participatory artefact and its power as a successful medium of exchange, presents the professional biographer with increased competition for the control over authoritative life narratives. As a truly ancient and ubiquitous practice, it is contemporarily more popular than ever, in the demographic and participatory senses of the term popular. It is now seen as public property: a published life is up for public debate and scrutiny. In sum, therefore, I would characterise this dilemma as the product of several major forces, which can be also explained essentially as a particularly modern example of tension between the rise of individualism and traditional structures of power or authority. More specifically I have identified the following elements causative for this tension:

1. **The threat to the auteur position and the biographer’s mandate as derived from Authorial Voice and Contextualised Authority**

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\(^1\) Hamilton (2008:325-326).
\(^3\) Edel (1987:35-42).
As noted previously, in any commercially produced biographical narrative it is common to find in the introduction, foreword, preface or dust jacket ‘blurb’ a notice of the author’s credentials. Significantly there is also usually a stress on the author’s link to the subject of the narrative. Presumably the stated link is also synonymous with the notion of authority: we need to have our trust in the author’s veracity established since the actual existence of the subject rarely needs to be challenged. Rather we are in need of reassurance that the author:

(a) Has done their research;
(b) Will provide an entertaining and factual account of the subject’s life;
(c) Has some link to the subject, either through studious historiography to the point where the author can personally identify with the subject or can otherwise demonstrate a relationship with the subject and can therefore speak from first-hand knowledge of that person.

The first challenge offered to the professional category of biographer and the theorists within the TPMA, ironically is as a result of the very success of their social role and specialization of their field. That is, the rapid development of the field of biographical expertise has produced TPMA commentators who are familiar with the literature and the privileged textual types. However they occupy a rarified field unresponsive to the much larger, parallel, informal field of life writing which exists beyond the TPMA academy. It would seem, that in response, or in anticipation of implied criticism of their narrow specialization, the professional biographer has sought to build a defence of credentialism.

It has been acknowledged that a viable, vibrant and ever expanding social history is being produced by persons with some, little or no expertise derived from formal tertiary qualifications. It presents a spontaneous, often amateur, but typically independent life writing activity which can also be seen as a challenge to the academic tradition. It has also been established that the TPMA and the profession of life writing offers distinct preference to the text produced within, for and by its own socially privileged authorial discourse. This is not necessarily to argue against such academic qualifications as such, since the authority of the text typically coincides with the methodological care and professionalism associated with this narrow, but highly influential band of textual production. As argued previously, the difficulty is not confined to the means of production or author. These quite frequently are limiting, and subject to any number of discursive elements, with inherent limits to the criticism of the product as it is constituted, since it is quite un-self-consciously projected as, quite simply, a superior cultural product. There is however, the valid criticism of the construction and medium of the biographical text which is illuminated by the existence of completely viable but almost ignored, textual and discursive alternatives. By contrast with these discursive alternatives the TPMA ways of viewing the text tend to the ostensibly introspective and metaphorically incestuous. That is, authors and texts from within a narrow

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2 That is, life writing as produced by authority figures, deriving their social force from professional, academic or literary qualifications, and for whom life writing is lucrative and/or socially advantageous.
social band increasingly dominate the privileged canon, and are writing about themselves or others from within the TPMA: “the growing number of (biographies) that have arisen from within the academy” has led to an “historians’ autobiographical turn after the 1970s”¹. This at a time when even the TPMA admits that a so far unexplored area and alternative way of seeing the text is to reverse the position of viewing to that of the reader, rather than the producer-auteur².

Any reading of a text, and by implication any reader therefore, present a threat to the auteur, who by definition dominates the biographical narrative as an authority on the subject. The auteur control over the material foregrounds the biographer rather than the subject. It is critical to understand the way in which these texts are read, since there are two ways of interpreting this idea of reading. The first is the simple linguistic transaction of understanding the sense groupings of syntax, grammar, lexicon and semantics-pragmatics. The person read, or the subject of the biography, is understood by an appeal to the reader’s discourse and background knowledge, whereby sense is made of a life narrated³.

More important, however, is when the text is read as a cultural artifact in concert with the status associated with the biographer. It is critical to consider at this point precisely what advantages the author of a privileged text enjoys. The first is the unitary voice and omniscient narrative, typically in the third person⁴. Secondly the artifact, as contained within the officially produced text, is backed by and endorsed socially by profession or, by an academic or commercial publishing house. The reader becomes aware of a condescending dispensation, wherein they are being allowed to access, almost by permission, intimate knowledge that the gatekeeper alone has complete access to. Both constituents generate normative validation, which is presumptively unquestioned by the reader, formed as it is by social trust and authoritative knowledge structures⁵.

And yet this maintenance of auteur status is occurring at the same time that the reading public is reportedly losing faith in the authorial voice⁶. Much is made, in literary theory, of the Barthesian hypothesis which asserts the “death of the author” in the decoding of a text⁷. The auteur biographer therefore seemingly operates in conflict with the entrenched position of the Barthesian anti- “God-author” argument, which criticizes the auteur systems of hyperbolic silencing of alternative ways of seeing:

According to this current school of thought, the voice emerging from the narrative, far from being the expression of an autonomous individual, is a very complex discursive phenomenon…we know that a

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¹ Aurell (2006:425-426). This is confirmed by Popkin (2005).
² Sarris (1963:26-28).
³ Halliday & Hasan (1976).
⁴ Currie (1998).
⁵ This is consistent with regimes of truth and institutional authority: Cameron et al (1992).
text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

This reference to extra-textual influences, or intertextuality, is useful in presenting and identifying the inadequacies of the unitary narrative for historical-literary presentations of lives. Indeed, the very existence of alternative ways of reading and producing texts, as presented in informal life writing, indicates that the professional biographer can no longer claim complete dominance and authority over the genre. So it seems that the professional biographer is relying on an increasingly undermined profession, when social history has cemented its place in the community as a viable alternative- or even set of alternatives. That is, there are viable ways of reading a text and the subject as text, which are exterior to the TPMA but which the TPMA is overwhelmingly rejecting if not overtly, by neglect.

Rejection (or neglect) entails awareness of and response to an entity and proposition. The TPMA, as I have shown, is well aware of the prevalence and diversity of popular life writing, but is dismissive of it. The credentialism, or substantiating of an author’s authority to speak on behalf of other, real persons, seems to have become a reflex action, which perhaps biographers do without even questioning their motives (or levels of motivation, subconscious and conscious) for doing so. These statements of authority, while true enough and motivationally justifiable, are also remarkably transparent under discourse analysis, for defensiveness, assumed privilege, deictic exclusiveness and insularity. The actual effect and purpose of this type of authoritative credentialisation is reader/consumer persuasion and suspension of disbelief; all of which of course are tied to either institutional placement or sales potential. There is also implicit within credentialism the need for exclusion of other intrinsically competing, narratives and narrators. The sum effect of such protectionism is to construct and perpetuate social endorsement of medium, structure, lineal narrative, institution and authorial voice; not to mention sales potential, which has seemingly become an additional, important consideration in TPMA discourse.

Added to these sensitivities is the added scrutiny from the media and a more discriminating public; both of which cannot fail to make an impact on the already difficult task faced by the conscientious professional biographer. Little wonder then that contemporary biographical theory has sought to dilute generic divisions and consciousness as a predictable response to this intense scrutiny. While outside the TPMA generic divisions remain generally fixed, it could be assumed that a certain methodological sanctuary from empiricism and all that it entails is contained in the academically popular escape from strict rules of evidence offered by creative non-fiction, historical fiction and various other generic alternatives. In effect, the biographical author is being

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1 Sexton (1986:19).
3 Using the fuller semantic-pragmatic potential of entailment as truth condition: Kuiper & Allan (2004).
foregrounded at the same time as literary theory diminishes the role of the author in every other genre.

The new biographer’s dilemma
2. The biographer as translator

Another challenge to the contemporary biographer lies in the growth of so-called translation theory. It should be a help rather than a hindrance, but it is a false friend. Apparently in further defence of the credentials of biographers, literary translation theory is invoked to support the sense of task achieved in producing a biography. There is the sense that the biographer is self-credentialising by emphasizing the difficulties involved in producing a biographical narrative, only to assert that they have accomplished what is therefore beyond most people.

However there are serious flaws not only in the theory itself, but also in the application of it to biography. Firstly there is the sense that in rearticulating the biographer’s dilemma as a translation task, the theorists have simply paraphrased Edel’s “transference dilemma” with more recent, and unnecessarily dense, opaque meta-language. Secondly it should be noted that in metaphorically casting the author as translator, it effectively characterises the process of sifting data as a type of linguistic translation, which it simply is not. In approaching biography from my linguistic-discourse analysis background, it is clear that translation signifies very different, even opposite concepts. In literary-historical theory, translation has been reduced to a metaphorical usage, while a much more highly developed theoretical understanding occurs in theory pertaining to linguistic interpreting-translation proper. The mutual unintelligibility between these two sets of theories can only be reconciled at the most fundamental level when re-articulating their purposes as being a discussion of decoding and rearticulating-mediation of texts, whether those texts are constituted by an individual or a literary text.

Indeed literary:

Translation theory holds, first and foremost, that all acts of communication are acts of translation…any (reading as translation) constitutes a “text” that is both material and a work of art.

Reading is already translation, and translation is translation for the second time.

1 Aveling (2004); Friedrich (1992).
6 Grigar & Barber (n.d.: 4-6).
Although there is a discursive and practical problem with referring to literal translation\(^1\) it can be used to distinguish between direct language translation and metaphorical translation, which is more properly referred to as intra-language semiotic-code transfer of propositional content\(^2\). The intra-language operation of decoding, rephrasing and rearticulating another person’s words within the same language certainly demands and utilises transfer and paraphrasing of propositional content, and relies on a competence in domain, register, syntax and semantic-pragmatic knowledge\(^3\). It, however, tends to the the sub-discourse level of transfer, which therefore exhibits a deficiency, or “pragmalinguistic transfer”\(^4\). Or it can be referred to as a failure at the perlocutionary level\(^5\). It is presumably this to which the theorists refer when talking about mediation of text, but it is imprecise to do so in this way.

Language to language transfer on the other hand, requires not only competence in both target and source languages, but also aims at achieving parity at the pragmatic complete discourse-equivalence level\(^6\). Translation theory proper is contingent upon ideas of accuracy, social equity and justice, supra-ideology, measurability and accountability under strictest transparency and empirical standards and codes of ethics\(^7\). It presupposes a competence at the discourse-perlocutionary level.

By contrast, metaphorical translation is typically opaque and subjective, reliant upon the individual’s intrinsic ideology and attachment to the text. As conceded, but probably overstated, in the TPMA literature, there is a mediated interaction endorsed in metaphorical translation which is minimised under translation proper. In response, the historically-trained academic will invoke the utility and superiority of Marwickian-style rules of evidence as credentials for scholarship and biographical integrity. Generalistic ideas of mediation as translation points to a discursive ideological filter, and seem to invoke Foucauldian fatalism about the inevitability of discursive interference or transference in the finished text\(^8\).

The difficulty therefore is that the leaders of TPMA biographical theory have invoked this metaphorical idea of translation to metaphorically cover their tracks. By saying that the task of biography is difficult and opaque they have permitted themselves an ideological indulgence in what becomes ultimately merely a failure of scholarship. The temptation for many biographers is to impose a discourse on the narrative which is predominantly their own. This can be the feminisation, psychological, or otherwise cultural interpretation

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\(^1\) Literal translation, despite its widespread usage as a term, and which is generally understood as “word for word translation” is by definition impossible, given pragmatic realities of language: Hale (2007:105-106).

\(^2\) This is my term which is more accurate as a definition of linguistic process and purpose, but probably unintelligible to literary translation theorists. This in turn indicates its poverty as functional metalanguage and theory overall.

\(^3\) Yule (2006); Coulthard (1977); Hale (2007).


\(^5\) Austin (1962).


\(^7\) Hale (2007).

\(^8\) Edel (1984:283-291).
which is entirely inappropriate: the subject’s life becomes another person’s property, a distortion, a theft, and certainly a mis-translation.

Rather than disclosure of their mediation, biographers typically offer declarations of their scholarly honesty, lack of bias, and truthfulness to primary sources pertaining to their subjects. As if unwilling to assume authority over the text they produce, biographers present themselves as mere “transmitters” of the verities included in their sources. By the same token, they typically apologize for the subjectivity that necessarily occurs when evidence is missing and undocumented lacunae must be filled in with speculations and hypotheses.¹

Nevertheless, despite the fundamental contradiction between uses of metalanguage, since we are stuck with the obstinate nature of the TPMA literature’s appellation it becomes necessary to find some means of reconciling the two fields of theory. At base, both types of translation can be rephrased as a functional dilemma, where the material-data presents an equation for linguistic solvability. That is, life writing presents the author with the central methodological aim of rendering others’ utterances into a meaningful format for a third party or assumed reader. The biographer must decode complex and competing multiple voices and styles, with their respective domains, contexts and registers, lifted from original documents or interlocutors’ memory. These discrete linguistic transactions must be organised into a new, typically unitary narrative. Sometimes these utterances are quoted verbatim, which presumably captures the essence of the speaker’s intention more closely, or the force of the illocutionary and locutionary acts.

The reference to translation can be useful to the biographer, if it is understood as an extended metaphor only. It is an interesting allusion, since for someone with a linguistic background it carries with it the denotational-semantic and connotational-pragmatic qualities of transferring conceptual material that also embodies paralinguistic and non-literal signification. Indeed, the familiar definition of translation will likely be the “process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended and presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language”². The term translation has some usefulness in describing the practical exercise which is biography: it is the re-characterisation or process of transferring another person’s life, words and memories into a unitary, narrative form, reflective of the original. The aim of this process is to reproduce the life of another in a format which is summative and factual.

It is also productive to view the biographer’s selection process as a type of synthesis, which is of necessity an abbreviating of the data or materials available, and a rearticulation of these selections into a sense-grouping of linearity, a chronological narrative which seeks to mimic life. It will, of course, always comprise an abbreviated life. Alternatively it can be described as

¹ Pekacz (2004:5).
historiographical research which by definition finds solutions to tensions in the data and conflict between competing interests. In this way the biographer mediates, translates, adjudicates and appropriates, before ultimately re-articulating what others have originally said. This includes the impersonal data of official accounts, which while loaded for primary textual source privileging, are also ultimately arbitrary and conventional. It is at this point that there is an unresolved problem which lingers on in the mind of any biographer: have I been true to the implicit trust placed in me not only by the reader but by the people behind the data itself, in my act of translation?

The new biographer’s dilemma
3. Social empowerment contemporarily

The gatekeeper role of the prestige biographer (academic, journalist, historian, or writer) is challenged by an increasingly literate and sophisticated readership. It has been indicated that the increased interest in life writing by the public has generated greater production and readership of biography. It has also been shown that a greater sophistication and scrutiny of the public text has occurred. These converging empowerments can be seen as synchronised with the rise of social history and the culture of life writing as a globalised activity and discourse. The contemporary reader of biography, therefore, is more sophisticated and discriminating, while simultaneously more likely to be active in their own production of life writing, and therefore more of a threat to the position of the privileged text and author than at any time previously. Along with the rise in empowerment socially as a general concept across social domains and margins, there is also the increased likelihood that the reader of biography will voice an opinion, given the number and accessibility of media where these opinions can enjoy exposure globally.

This new, empowered and vocal, reader presents a dilemma which Edel could not have imagined. It is also a challenge that the TPMA literature is seemingly unprepared for. The dilemma itself can be characterised as a challenge to the directions this literature has taken. For instance the TPMA literature seeks to obliterate generic constraints at a time when the readers of biography are demanding increased accountability for the published text in its depiction of real persons. Also, the readers of biography are seeking to have more input in the depictions of the subject and interested persons. They are seeking to extend the life of the narrative beyond the traditional book, into other media and into an open-ended dialogue, where contributions are welcome and transparently available for discussion and individual interpretation.

The new biographer’s dilemma
4. Face

As an equation of Face, the success of the biographer relies on the failure of the co-participants or interested persons. The biographer creates an artificial
environment in the production of a seamless narrative with lineal dynamics\(^1\), and also requires from the reader and interested persons (including the subject) acquiescence to a form of social prescription where the authorial voice is privileged over the unrepresented or voiceless\(^2\). This is a construction of unequal power. While the TPMA academic biographer enjoys gatekeeper control and social endorsement, there is still the need to assert credentials, especially where this person feels outnumbered and at risk of loss of power and prestige if unsuccessful. There is also in this equation of face, the dynamics of social prescription where the authorial voice is privileged over the unrepresented or voiceless. These interested persons are categorised as other: deficient for objectivity or knowledge with all of its attendant denotative and connotative qualities: “many are and remain amateurs, biographers of occasion, chroniclers by accident; they think too little about art and talk too much about objective fact”\(^3\). The diminishing or even unacknowledged status of informal life writing in general, but also the backgrounded position of data contributors, constitutes a silence in the text where not only does the biographer draw power away from the constituted other, but also asserts the right to speak for these persons so characterized.

The new biographer's dilemma
5. Intertextuality, heteroglossia, the biographical afterlife and consumer rights

The suggestion of intertextuality, in the literary sense, has considered the nature of overlapping readings of texts, such that there is a certain indeterminacy in any one reading of any given text. This means that the reader brings a wider discourse of prior textual knowledges and influences which are beyond the text itself\(^4\). The new dilemma for the biographer then, is the need to acknowledge that the reader, in the context of wider accessibility and readership of biographical texts, both formal and informal, is familiar with a greater variety and depth of textual knowledges than ever before. This intertextuality may equal, if not exceed the cultural life writing literacy of the biographer.

Similarly, the reader is also likely to have a sense of the potentialities of multiple alternatives in representation and in voice. In the preparation of a biographical text, there already exists a heteroglossia\(^5\), which is only partly consulted in the first level of consultation. This is then subsumed in the unitary narrative to some degree. Better biographies retain a high level of this multi-voice plurality, but there is still a demand for the unitary, pre-packaged account which also contains the moral message and/or teleology of the life story. There is in this, a general anticipation of the authorial command of the material.

\(^1\) Labov & Waletzky (1967).
\(^3\) Batchelor (2003:214).
\(^5\) Bakhtin (1986).
However, the possibility implicit in heteroglossia and intertextuality is a lively readership sense of the possibilities of representation and intertextual influences beyond the text itself. Just as readers enjoy a unilateral narrative for its own merits, as represented by the traditional biographical text, readers also seem quite capable of digesting narratives which are online and interactive. While the commercial biographical market continues unabated, there is also a growing demand for alternative, un-decidable or non-determined narrative where the reader can assess the material for themselves. What is more, there seems no difficulty for readers in moving between the various, conflicting types of narrative. It is to this that the TPMA academy and biographers in general, presupposing the industry in these generalizations, must be reconciled. Currently, however the very existence of such alternatives is barely noticed in the TPMA literature, along with the highly sophisticated, culturally literate readership that anticipates such a life writing development.

There is also with the higher sophistication of contemporary life writing readership, the reality of informational accessibility. This type of challenge facing the contemporary biographer can be loosely summed up as being products of the age we find ourselves in: the information age, where data can be accessed, uploaded, checked against and rechecked almost instantly, are challenges for the measured voice of the biographer. The multiplicity of competing voices, angles and world views demanding the attention of the reader also combine to generate a narrative marketplace. Any text is subjected to the reading which can be more culturally literate than that of the author: especially if the biographer is not especially computer-literate. This is why there is some merit in the idea of a wider representation of voices, however unreliable or amateurish they are considered.

What this signifies is that the increasing sophistication, power and experience in the production and readership of biography in all its various forms, has created a new confidence amongst the consumers and producers of life writing to assert their perceived and actual rights. This could conceivably be expressed in the assertion of consumer rights. For instance, the question might be asked in the wake of demonstrated biographical fraud: does the customer have an entitlement to a refund when the commercially produced biographical text fails to deliver on its promise of factuality? This of course presupposes that factuality can be measured and the pact of trust can be proven, presumably in the context of advertised content and authorship.

These relationships are consulted by the biographer, but not acquired in any real sense, although the rearticulation of others’ memories for the purposes of a unitary, lineal narrative format can be considered as being ultimately the intellectual property of the author. Nevertheless, such a codification of others’ testimonies, documentary evidence and memories can be seen as problematic. It can be argued that what occurs in the consultative process is the development of a dual, parallel system of memory: one encapsulated in a biography, the other, original system of remembering remaining with the data contributor. Indeed, the shifting, complex nature of remembering and the appropriation of memory by a third party for re-codification into an authorial
narrative can be compared as systems of fallible historical documentation, subject to multiple discursive formations. The fact that a published text contains one person’s impressions of others’ discourses is intrinsically representational. Not surprisingly, there is subsequently some notion of entitlement, or co-authorship, with these interested persons in the finished biographical product, since the biography is representative, in a formal, public text of memory, which by definition is essentially private. It was apparent that this is a sentiment common to and inherent with the biographical process, although the literature tends to a repression, if not silence, of data contributors’ thoughts and affect on this subject.

It seems certain that memory is a facet of relationship, closely tied to emotion, self-esteem, sense of place and discourse. Asking a person to dislodge, alter or relinquish a memory does not seem feasible; even though memory does seem to be transformed involuntarily. As a verbal linguistic transaction, the sharing of a memory is typically a routinely seamless communication, as viewed through Speech act theory. This is not to contradict the theoretical understanding of the formation of unstable and unreliable memory as a process of limited conscious control. Nevertheless, oral testimony is increasingly valued as documentary evidence if retrieved from its original source and immediate context. At the same time commentators recognise that the method of collection of data is highly subject to interpretation: that knowledge is mediated and filtered through stages of information sharing and in personal discursive construction, which includes the “observer’s paradox”. So, naturally the interpretation of another person’s memories is subject to factors which are potentially, beyond conscious control. This is especially true when the distance between source (and thus original context of sharing) and other codification is greater: there is more margin for error (or misrepresentation). That is why the original ownership of memory retains this historical-discursive-evidentiary value. The ‘raw data’ aspect of biographical contributors’ communications does not constitute “free floating knowledge”, but it is as close to it as any communication can be. It also contains within its original contextualisation the key for narrow (and therefore more accurate) interpretation with all the attendant non-verbal (paralinguistic and prosodic) clues offered in a verbal, face to face exchange which essentially disambiguate meaning but which cannot be replicated in literal codifications.

A useful analogy could be made, in returning to the idea of translation, in comparing this use of ‘original data’ or direct quotes from data contributors, with the use of borrowings or untranslated textual items, which often appear in the literature. The typical reason for retention of such items verbatim is that

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5 Offord (2009:2).
8 Using the standard term from linguistics which signifies a lexical item taken from another language into English (transliterated if necessary) which is left ‘untranslated’. Examples are c’est la vie, schadenfreude: Crystal (1995)
they express content in the original which is difficult (if not impossible) to render in English\textsuperscript{1}. The same principle applies in standard academic citation, where transparency and accountability to sources of information are considered as being indispensable. Similarly, it is predictable that if a text is further removed from its original context with an interpretive lens which is hostile to the original context, there is greater margin for error. It is tantamount to a misreading of the communicative act. This is why the commentary and ‘reading’ through a narrow interpretive lens, such as tendentious post-modernism, easily distorts the data. If the biographer works from the academy, with its greater specialisation for knowledge and information, this person also has a greater accountability for the interpretation of another’s biographical contributions. It is essential to admit wider, even popular knowledges, not because popular or informal biography has commercial value or because it is ‘good’ biography, but because, as Hamilton has said, life writing needs to be understood as a stand-alone human activity. It is in this study of the popular discourse that the academy, potentially at least, has greatest application, relevance and authority. A central feature of this democratic life writing activity is the way it frames more formal categories of life writing. Biographical theory needs pollination from practice, and this means a new understanding of life writing as praxis. Part of this new understanding and theory is the acceptance of a person’s inherent power over memory, which appears to be more diffused socially, and increasingly guarded by a self-aware public with a sense of entitlement.

So, while it is impossible to ask a person to relinquish memory altogether, the biographer is nonetheless asking a very difficult equation when asking people to relinquish control of memory for the purposes of seeing it transformed into another person’s telling of it. There is reason to consider that the material a biographer deals with could be usefully compared with intellectual property rights, or copyrighted material: Closely analogous to patented inventions are the rights of authors of published materials...the author of an unpublished manuscript could restrain its publication...a person could be restrained from publishing notes taken from the spoken word at a lecture or play\textsuperscript{2}.

Data surrendered to any biographer during the consultation process is effectively loaned for the purposes of compiling a narrative document which, while editorially the biographer’s, never passes into that person’s exclusive scholarly or creative domain. To take it further, the biographical pact of trust is applicable to the data supplied to the biographer with the understanding that it will be used in context and in accordance with the interested person’s original intention. This is complicated by a lack of facility for the right of reply in the unitary narrative once it has been produced, or even when the material is completely appropriated by the biographer in the final draft. This causes another dilemma for the scholarship of biography: there is an inherent anti-

\textsuperscript{1} The merits of this stance are discussed in: Hale (2007).
\textsuperscript{2} Baker (1990: 515-516).
dialogic nature in the formal text, which is fixed discursively, spatially and temporally.

This has been highlighted implicitly in recent discussions of the biography’s (or subject’s) so-called “afterlife”: its public reception and life as a text beyond its publication\(^1\), as well as the:

Cultural afterlife of the subject. What happened in the 20 or 100 years after their death? What difference did the discovery of new biographical material make to their reputation? And how did the subsequent editing and republication of key works change the shape of their textual legacy?\(^2\)

I have offered examples of texts which have been subsequently challenged and overthrown by the right of reply (Khouri, Bob Hawke, Ellis), especially through media scrutiny. I have also discussed texts which have not been adequately challenged, but which, in my opinion, should have been (Freudenberg, Watson). One singular thought which arises, is what might have happened had the autobiography of Hazel Hawke appeared many years earlier, before Bob Hawke had obtained the Prime Ministership of Australia: would he have enjoyed the political success and longevity that he did? It is clear that the formal biography has great power, not only in its shelf life, but also beyond the text, in forming public opinion and in shaping careers.

It is also clear that a vast informational power lies outside the formal biography in the various domains of informal life writing, the media, and in public life writing literacy. I would argue that Barack Obama was the first US political candidate to fully take advantage of the potential beyond the formal biography, to be assessed as never before informally and formally, online and in person, and to succeed. His two predecessors were political scalps of the power of life representation in the hands of a much wider, active readership which scrutinised them and found them (to put it mildly) wanting. I would suggest that the readership of life writing, with its developing self-awareness and latent power, also has the means to undermine the autonomy and monopoly over biography vested in the academy. This will be increasingly manifested in demanding and obtaining the right of reply, control over depiction, and control of data supplied by interested persons. At the same time, informal life writing will overshadow the formal category in total production, in accessibility and, perhaps most importantly, in an open dialogue with history.

\(^1\) Hamilton (2008:340-344).
\(^2\) Hughes (2009).
Conclusion: Collaborative Biography- a practical and theoretical solution to the modern biographer’s dilemma.

This thesis has demonstrated that a particularly modern dilemma exists for the contemporary biographer: life writing is a victim of its own success. This dilemma exists largely as a result of life writing’s popularity as both an immensely successful commercial product and a participatory social artefact as expressed or realised through an immense depth and diversity of informal life writing. Indeed, the overall increase in the reading and production of life writing across social domains represents a major and unique historical development in which personal expression and social privileging of the individual life are encouraged and allowed greater technological accessibility and exposure than ever before. Although as yet without specifically quantifying study, there is sufficient evidence available already to indicate that life writing is distinctly a mass participatory social activity with attendant relevance to social history and sociolinguistic analysis. General cultural literacy and reader sophistication for the field of life writing is demonstrably greater than is assumed, and could conceivably parallel if not exceed that of the academy. I have used the label ‘the democratisation of biography’, to indicate the significance of this phenomenon. Gatekeeper power over the authoritative telling of lives is being challenged by those who could be labelled ‘the uncredentialled’.

In addition to the contemporary rise of life writing it was necessary also to demonstrate that contextually the current popularity of biography is a specific and particularly modern reaction to ancient and ubiquitous human needs for socialisation through the recording of lives. The Lejeune-esque underlying trust in life writing between author and reader is traceable to and valorised by deeper sub-ideological human needs of trust and validation in linguistic exchanges and in wider human relationships. It is here that insights from DA, psychology and other disciplines have reaffirmed that truth is not merely a construct, but rather a deep-seated Chomskyan hard-wired facility related to language capacity and an innate communicative foundational requirement. Against this multi-disciplinary reading of biography, the Barthes-Foucauldian, philosophical-literary TPMA academic devaluation of generic integrity looks remarkably outmoded, simplistic and ideologically motivated. Further, it was demonstrated from a survey of Australian universities how an uneasy relationship for the TPMA generic and theoretical placement of biography in either literature or history affects its teaching and reading. There is, then, a serious disjunct discursively and practically in the experience (or reading) of biography between the TPMA and the wider readership of life writing.

I assert that biography by definition occupies a stand-alone genre, or to be more precise, consists of a macro-genre into which can be placed a variety of biographical categories: including attempts at subversion (or usurpation) such as Creative Non-Fiction. As a social artefact, life writing challenges the rigid ideas of social prescriptiveness in literary/genre theory because it constitutes a complex genre which eludes any attempts at generic subversion. At the
same time life writing is inclusive of and resistant to mythologising and ideology, serving a sub-ideological human need that subverts language construction and which owes allegiance to and defines itself as a cultural artefact independently of all other constructions.

To support this conclusion I demonstrated how biography has been fostered in a uniquely individualist Anglosphere tradition, and how in various textual examples generic integrity is maintained through implicit rules and invisible norms. This implicit generic structure was compared to explicit codifications under law such as libel, fraud and intellectual copyright, to indicate the essential social function which truth conditions fulfil and replicate. The erroneous assumptions of TPMA aesthetic licence with its associated literary theory I showed to be mere discursive constructions in themselves. By comparison, the readership tolerance of subjectivity and interpolations, where authorial intentionality is made explicit, indicates a highly sophisticated and discriminating literacy, both informational and cultural.

Additional to these features of readership literacy I have also presented the assertion that the democratisation of biography carries with it the entailment of a consumerist and interested person entitlement. That is, the readership of life writing currently is informed by an enhanced literacy and social empowerment, such that the process of writing biography is now understood as being consultative of relationship and memory. This readership is also constituted of interested persons, for whom there is, in the reading of biography, a conflict of ownership. It is an ownership which asserts that memory and relationship can never be relinquished, and therefore it is an ownership of the biographical narrative which remains outside the published narrative itself. It remains emblematic of an open ended, heteroglossia-dialogue which cannot be contained within the unitary, static narratorial construction which is selected and 'translated' or mediated from this ongoing externality. In the context of the traditional, static unitary narrative, this external dialogue continues in a parallel medium. It is only the increased power of media scrutiny which has highlighted its existence. Indeed there is implicit in this media spotlight, the power and degree of public sympathy for these silenced or backgrounded persons. In some documented instances, it is evident that a flawed biographical narrative can be overthrown in the public view when interested persons are able to present alternative views.

The dilemma for the modern biographer then becomes more than Edel's 1987 discussion of methodology; an excellent but outmoded discussion of the need to balance historiography and art. It becomes a contested field for control where the representation of others' lives is increasingly being understood as an ethical dilemma. The underlying trust in life writing between author and reader as established for the pact of biography can now be assumed to include the interested persons beyond the narrative, whose memories and contributions are both solicited and ignored; both internal and external to the final, unitary narrative. There is, in this implicit act of trust in offering information for the exclusive use of the biographer, an act which is increasingly offered with strings attached.
I predict that the solution to this dilemma will probably not arrive from the TPMA, but from the marketplace, where the precedent for problem solving and application of technology to demand is already well-established. Indeed, the application of life writing to various multi-media and online media opportunities shows an entirely fluid and rapid life writing \( r/e \)volution which will very likely continue to find solutions for changing needs. The opportunities offered for multi-voiced and multi-modal life writing experiences which cater for heteroglossic and interactive life writing dialogic approaches are vastly superior to the static introspection of the traditional text. The TPMA will then need to play catch up with a constantly evolving and rapidly growing popular life writing with which it seems already unable or unwilling to engage. If it fails to do so, it risks becoming irrelevant to life writing as a majority socially experienced practice.

I would not argue against the continuance of the editorialised book however. Its endurance points to a fundamental utility and appeal which is unlikely to change, especially since it forms the essential model for digital life writing. Rather, I would suggest a practical and philosophical solution which combines the competing forms. Instead of the existing term “collaborative autobiography” which is misleading since it usually refers to “ghost writing of an autobiography”\(^1\), I would suggest the more inclusive collaborative biography. It offers an acknowledgment of a greater participation between contributors and author, where the contributions and memories of contributors are utilised to a more representative level, and where ownership does not pass from one to the other.

Practically, collaborative biography needs to offer greater documentary inclusion and retention of competing discourses rather than selection. The Boswellian style, exhaustive and inclusive, can be considered as a model which is closer to the possibilities offered by competing discourses contained within the unitary narrative’s appeal\(^2\). Length, in the style of Boswell, however is less important than his successful inclusion of voices for the imitation of collaborative biography. There is, for instance in the blog or Facebook page a text and response style which offers the immediate connection with the personal, subjective narrator. It also replicates the ancient interpersonal communication of a conversation within a biographical text-regardless of its seemingly impersonal cyberspace medium. Indeed, the digital text, especially if it offers an interactive facility, may provide a reconciliation between competing media and communicative needs. Together with the need for greater representation, open-ended editing, contribution and heteroglossia there is also the central, effective and time-honoured status of the narrator, against which responses make sense: both are indispensable. The omniscient narrator has great utility for unitary voice and direct, lineal recount of events. While the challenges to the modern biographer are numerous, powerful and methodologically significant, the death of the author is, in the words of Mark Twain, slightly exaggerated\(^3\). It is also premature and inaccurate. Given the continued commercial success of the traditional biography, its placement in

\(^1\) Jolly (2001).
\(^2\) He is canonical following: Donaldson (2006); Hamilton (2007)(2008); Jolly (2001).
\(^3\) Oxford (1992:261): the actual reference is “The report of my death was an exaggeration”.

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the social-historical narrative and its massive social resurgence throughout the spectrum of informal media, life writing shows no signs of a terminal disease.

Despite the Barthesian attack on the narrator-author, there is a direct reproducibility in the narratorial voice which is imitative of a personal conversation. It also offers the immediacy and personal appeal of the witness testimony, however ‘mythologised’ or ideologised. In fact the subjectivity of the narrator is at the heart of all biographical appeal. I am proposing therefore a maintenance of this editorialised narrator, but with the option of parallel voices offering alternative accounts, which can be read simultaneously, tangentially or sequentially, via digital links. These alternative voices are interactive, occupying spaces attached to and contextualised by the main authoritative narrative, but accessible independently and/or in combination. The multimedia possibilities offered by digital recordings as well as textual contributions indicate a much more immediate, un-mediated dialogue between readers and authors. The enticing option of popular control by viewing (page hits/contributions) as an unrestrained (or unrestrainable) means of editorialising offers the possibility of an entirely new form of social history produced and directly manipulated by readership literacy.

There is already some evidence of this type of popular history through life writing, and it can be labelled a *Wikipedia*-isation⁠² of biography. Editorial control is maintained by authoritative checking to some extent: the reliability of all other information is as predictable as its contributors. Anticipating a criticism of documentary overload in the tradition of scholarly biography, there is provision in online media for the simple archiving of older items. Also, in anticipation of criticism for the amateurish nature of popular contributions, online media is malleable for editorial control: dissent can be filtered for libel or offensiveness, while at the same time veracity is regulated by other contributors. Indeed, the opportunities offered in such a highly interactive forum for instant access to a depth of documentary and testimonial evidence provide more need than ever for trained professionals to sift, evaluate and generate commentary. By being interactive *collaborative biography* offers the methodological and massive documentary possibilities afforded by the scholarly biography but with the editorial narratives offered by the literary biography.

Philosophically, *collaborative biography* offers a solution to the contested narratives of memory and the moral dilemma of exclusion and ownership. Informal life writing can be construed as a form of biography parallel to the commercially published book, which both validates the official form because it seeks a replication of its exposure and readership, and which also seeks to subvert the official form because it competes with it for public attention. The nature of this material emphatically asserts that what is socially constructed as being mundane or extraneous to the canon of biography as identified by the TPMA gatekeepers of literature and history is indeed worthy of recognition, of recording and commemoration. It is therefore, definable by

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² The online encyclopedia describes itself as collaborative, and interactive: “The Wikimedia Foundation operates some of the largest collaboratively edited reference projects in the world”. Sourced 26-09-2007 at: http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Home
comparison with the official privileged text while presenting an autonomous alternative to it. By direct linking to the informal categories, there is the validation of the unvoiced. They obtain foregrounded representation and a feeling of greater control, or a say over the use of their relationships and memories, as well as a right of reply linked to the original narrative. There is a sense of democracy in the popular assessment of their rights and credentials, as historical contributors and as persons, autonomous and interested. The generic integrity of the social practice of life writing is thus amplified by the inclusion of multiple subjectivities. After all, a life can be viewed as a sum of one person’s relationships with other persons. These subjectivities accumulate and form a three-dimensional portrait in a way that makes traditional readings of lives look either like caricatures or painterly-abstracted. The collaborative biography may very well offer sight, sound, past, future, present, multiple angles and views, as well as reflections upon reflections: that is, an internal view of the nature of life writing itself.

Rather than avoiding subjectivity, or asserting the impossibility of objectivity, collaborative biography amasses a (largely unedited) documentary collection of subjectivities, intact in all their intrinsic factual weaknesses and strengths. The sophisticated reader can then navigate both the editorialized narrative and the documentary evidence of multiple contributors; from which other interpretations are entirely possible and desirable. The Marwickian, open-ended historical dialogue thus evolves constantly, while leaving traces exposed to view: historical method becomes not only a collaborative achievement but also entirely transparent. At the same time the reader may also select from a diversity of unitary narratives if that is a preferred option. Coherence is thus a matter of levels of sophistication. It is this optionality which also answers the problem of too much data, or the typical criticism of ‘scholarly biography’ which simply accumulates data without (or with conscious active suppression of) subjective organisation. Of course the future for collaborative biography does depend on the degree to which gatekeepers accede to its potentialities, which includes threat to social position. There is the matter of control via theory, but this should be countered by the fact that adaptation may become essential for theoretical relevance anyway. Allowing the reader to decide on issues of fact or fiction seems to be a perilous proposal, but regimes of truth do not have an unblemished historical record either. Indeed, I would suggest that the democratization of biography and the model of collaborative biography may be in the academy’s best interests. It offers an accountability and fertile field of production for study and interaction beyond the academy itself from which it can draw new vigour and engagement, before it risks utter irrelevance.

1 Jolly (2001); Hamilton (2007); Pekacz (2004).
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Appendix A: A C Nielsen – Bookscan survey (biography sales report)

This document presents an extended excerpt from an Analytical Report commissioned and owned by me, dated September 29th 2003, and conducted by A C Nielsen/BookScan Australia (copyright retained):

...With regard to the Australian market, I have used our AP2 panel which covers 75% of the retail market; NB Target and WH Smith were not contributing data at this stage...For the Australian market I have provided Total figures in Value and Volume for the period Jul 02-Jun 03. I have also provided information on growth in the category. I have compared 2003 Year to Date to the same period last year...What I am able to provide for the US, is only the percentage that Biographies/Autobiographies has of the total market and show whether this has increased or not. So as you will see I have shown that in 2002 the category was worth 1.7% of the total market and in 2003 YTD 2.85%, so you can see there is an increase in terms of the share of the total market...

**Australian Market Figures for Biography Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total figure for 2003 wk27-37 (Jul02-Jun03) AP2</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percentage of total Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biographies/Autobiographies</td>
<td>2082733</td>
<td>$52,398,594.60</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Growth in category (YTD 2003 compared to same period 2002)- Quarter 1,2,3 AP2**

|          | 10.43% | 13.49% |

**USA Market Figures for Biography Category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biographies/Autobiographies</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003 YTD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Total Market</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: University teaching of life writing by genre

**Aim of study:** To ascertain if life writing is offered at the course or subject level across all 39 Australian universities.

**Methodology:** A search of all undergraduate and postgraduate courses and subjects offered in 2008-2009 at Australian universities was conducted. This study used each University’s search engine with the following **Keywords:** Biography, Autobiography, Creative Writing, Creative non-fiction, Life Writing. Note that many courses have been discontinued or absorbed (eg. Monash). Search also used University listings of courses/subjects/pathways/Faculties/Majors/Minors. If the keywords were not present in any of the subjects offered, it was assumed that the content may be present, but was not identified as a critical component of that subject, and therefore not advertised as being offered.

**Cross study:** the results were then compared to 6 major universities in the USA and UK which offer life writing and which produce journals in the field of biography. Further, the results were added to by an examination of the fields represented at the IABA 2008 Conference at Hawaii by presenters.

**Caveat:** it is acknowledged that since this study was conducted, several major developments across courses have occurred at **Sussex** and **ANU** in the past 12 months. Nevertheless, the information gathered was correct at source date; and overall the data is representative of the situation then and indicative of the situation now.

**Life Writing offered as a subject by genre at University**

**Australian universities:**

1. **Australian Catholic University [ACU]**
   - No specific courses.
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at: http://www.acu.edu.au/

2. **Australian National University [ANU]**
   - Has located its newly established **HRG Biographical Institute** generally within Humanities but specifically aligned with History, and publishes the **Australian Dictionary of Biography**.
   - There is also an emphasis on digital arts/literature with biographical components.
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at: http://studyat.anu.edu.au/programs/3020XBADIG;courses.html
3. Bond University [Bond]
   - CNF offered with Journalism
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

4. Central Queensland University [CQU]
   - Literature studies
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:
     http://www.cqu.edu.au/arts/humanities/litstud/naff/naffintro.html#anchor1009411

5. Charles Darwin University [CDU]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

6. Charles Sturt University [CSU]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:
     http://www.csu.edu.au/cgi-pub/course/newgetcourse?nationality=Australia&top=Either+On+Campus+or+Distance&two=Undergraduate&three=All&submit.x=73&submit.y=13

7. Curtin University of Technology [CURTIN]
   - Creative Non-Fiction subject, within Department of Communication and Cultural Studies
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

8. Deakin University [Deakin]
   - No specific subject
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

9. Edith Cowan University [ECU]
   - Specific subjects offered in History, English-Creative Writing, Psychology, Politics and Professional Writing (School of Education and Arts)
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

10. Flinders University [FLINDERS]
    - Life Writing offered in English
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
11. **Griffith University** [GRIFFITH]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://www17.griffith.edu.au/cis/p_cat/require.asp?ProgCode=1021&amp;Type=structure

12. **James Cook University** [JCU]
    - No specific subjects
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

13. **La Trobe University** [LA TROBE]
    - Specific subjects offered across Creative Writing, History and Literature, based in English.
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

14. **Macquarie University** [MACQUARIE]
    - Specific subjects offered in Literature
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

15. **Monash University** [MONASH]
    - No specific subjects
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/current/study-areas/undergraduate/history/index.php#3

16. **Murdoch University** [MURDOCH]
    - No specific subjects
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

17. **Queensland University of Technology** [QUT]
    - No specific subjects
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://www.courses.qut.edu.au/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Courses.woa/wa/selectMajorFromMain?structureID=all&amp;courseID=7055#all

18. **RMIT University** [RMIT]
    - Subjects offered across English and Communications, especially postgraduate.
    - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
19. Southern Cross University [SCU]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at: http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/sass/index.php/2/

20. Swinburne University of Technology [SWINBURNE]
   - Postgraduate subjects in Creative Writing
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at: http://courses.swinburne.edu.au/Subjects/ViewSubject.aspx?mi=300&id=3752

21. University of Adelaide [ADELAIDE]
   - Specific subjects in History

22. University of Ballarat [BALLARAT]
   - No specific subjects

23. University of Canberra [CANBERRA]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at: http://www.canberra.edu.au/courses/index.cfm

24. University of Melbourne [MELBOURNE]
   - Specific subjects offered in Creative Writing
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at: http://www.ba.unimelb.edu.au/ugrad/fields/Creative_Writing.html

25. University of New England [UNE]
   - Specific subjects offered in Journalism
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at: http://www.une.edu.au/courses/2008/units/ENCO328

26. University of New South Wales [UNSW]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at: http://empa.arts.unsw.edu.au/currentstudents/undergraduate/courses.html
27. University of Newcastle [NEWCASTLE]
   - Specific subjects offered in English
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

28. University of Notre Dame Australia - The [UNDA]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://www.nd.edu.au/downloads/fremantle/courses/artsSciences/ba_arts_el_t_s_mar08.pdf

29. University of Queensland [QUEENSLAND]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

30. University of South Australia [UniSA]
   - Creative Non-Fiction offered under Communication studies
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

31. University of Southern Queensland [USQ]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://www.usq.edu.au/handbook/current/arts/BART.html#programsummary

32. University of Sydney [SYDNEY]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://edutech.arts.usyd.edu.au/Artsonline/v2_1_UOST/dsp_uosList.cfm?SID=3

33. University of Tasmania [TASMANIA]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

34. University of Technology Sydney [UTS]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:

35. University of the Sunshine Coast [USC]
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
36. **University of Western Australia [UWA]**
   - No specific subjects
   - Sourced 4-7-2008 at:
     http://www.studyat.uwa.edu.au/undergrad/australian/courses

37. **University of Western Sydney [UWS]**
   - Subjects within Literature
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:
     http://future.uws.edu.au/ug/arts/arts

38. **University of Wollongong [UOW]**
   - Subjects within Literature
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

39. **Victoria University [VU]**
   - Specific subjects offered in Literature and Communication Studies.
   - Sourced 2-7-2008 at:

**Summary:**
- 39 Australian universities
- 21 do not offer any specific subjects/units in Life Writing
- Of the 18 which do, subjects are offered in:
  - English/Creative Writing/Literature (11)
  - Communication/Journalism/CNF (4)
  - History (3)

La Trobe and Edith Cowan offer subjects across English, History and Creative Writing (but base the discipline in English); ANU bases its Research Centre in History (publisher of *Australian Dictionary of Biography*). Internationally, only the University of Hawaii has what can be described as a stand alone research centre in Biography.

University departments foregrounding the teaching of biography typically locate it in English. These include the University of Hawaii and Latrobe University, which claim to be the first universities worldwide to offer specialized courses in biography, although Hawaii is the only university to offer full degrees in life writing.

A few exceptions exist for the placement of life writing in English. The Australian National University is an example, which has located its newly established *HRG Biographical Institute* generally within Humanities but specifically aligned with History (Sourced 7-12-2007 at: http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/BIOGINST/index.php). Similarly, New York University has begun offering courses on biography within History (Sourced 7-12-2007 at: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/course_database/courses/v/E23.2252).
UK Universities:

University of Sussex
- Writing Lives offered as a subject within English
- Sourced 2-7-2008 at: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/publications/ugrad2008/subjects/English/17341

University of Oxford
- Studied as a subject within History
- New Dictionary of National Biography published
- Sourced 2-7-2008 at: http://www.googlesyndicatedsearch.com/u/Oxford?q=biography&Go=Find&domains=history.ox.ac.uk&sitesearch=history.ox.ac.uk

University of Cambridge
- No specific subjects
- Sourced 2-7-2008 at: http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/subjects.html

USA Universities:

New York University
- Subjects on biography within History
- Sourced 7-12-2007 at: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/course_database/courses/v/E23.2252

University of Hawaii
- Independent University Centre for research on biography within English
- Sourced 7-12-2007 at: http://www.hawaii.edu/biograph/cbrhistory.html

University of Pittsburgh
- Subjects offered within Creative Writing/Creative Non-Fiction
- Lee Gutkind is considered as the founder of Creative Non-Fiction as a tertiary discipline
- Sourced 7-12-2007 at: http://www.creativenonfiction.org/thejournal/gutkind.htm

Summary of presenters at the 6th IABA Conference (Hawaii, 2008)¹

Total number of papers presented: 174

Presenters from English departments (Including crossovers with Communication Studies, Gender studies etc) 143 (82%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenters from Biography (Hawaii)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters from art studies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters from History</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters from religion, linguistics (and various other)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Study of 90 commercial biographical works for omissions

This is a summary of a study of omissions in 90 formally published biographies, and the measure of success of challenges to each published account.

Aim of study/question: to evaluate whether the formal life writing narrative can be successfully challenged when omissions are identified.

Methodology:

- **Texts** were selected as being representative of several major categories of life writing, as defined by Jolly (2001) or as referenced in Abrams (1988) as being historical life writing textual examples with generic and/or literary merit.
- I then simplified these divisions into:
  - Literary auto/biography (including academic, political writing).
  - Historical non-fiction (including didactic texts).
  - Historical plays and Biopics (and/or Creative non-fiction).
- For example Shakespeare’s historical plays provide a tension between the factual, ideological and dramatic needs of the genre, but this tension invites comparisons with other texts on the same historical subjects, and authors responding to Shakespeare include Tranter, McCullough and various Hollywood biopics.
- The question therefore for this study is not the relative factual merits of each text, but the **controversy** they spark and the textual responses which attempt to overturn the original textual ‘authority’.
- The **success** of each textual challenge is the ability to **displace** the original text with another, more powerful text.
- The success of each challenge was **measured** through an internet search where applicable (detailed below), or through media debate and commercial success of competing texts (where applicable).
- **Formal writing** was defined as being published through a commercial industry text (film, book, play) or through a tertiary publishing arm.
- Texts were selected as being **high profile** examples for each category.
- **High profile** was defined as consisting of any or all of the following features: being commercially successful, being generically significant, being the subject of media scrutiny, or being a text which has invited textual responses (either imitative or rebuttal).
- Texts were split between literary biography and historical plays/creative writing, to demonstrate the tension between the needs of factuality and raconteurism. The balance of these texts (Historical non-fiction) attempted a middle path between these tensions.
- This selection was intended as a reflection of social reality, where production of texts mirrors social priorities and experience.
- That is, biopics are probably more popular and more successful for **multi-modal semiotic layers of meaning making (visual, aural, written)** which makes them more memorable and durable than the written text, while historical texts fill a gap between these literacy types.
These categories were:

- Literary auto/biography (including academic, political writing): total 33 texts (category L).
- Historical non-fiction (including didactic texts): total 6 texts (category H).
- Historical plays and Biopics (and/or Creative non-fiction): total 51 texts (category C).

Omissions are evaluated for cumulative-incremental and residual effect on the reader, as well as intentionality. They are considered major if they distort the overall effect of a life narrative so that it is at variance with documentable facts. Omissions are identified by extant commentary in the field of literature or history, and further assessed through DA. Some examples of commentary or evidentiary testing are listed here (but are too voluminous to include in entirety). Texts were chosen in roughly equal amounts from commercial literary biography, historical non-fiction, Creative non-fiction, and Creative Writing (including historical plays). Omissions include:
  - invented dialogue, events, characters-persons (including subject)
  - subjective or ideological interpretations-interpolations
  - lineal narrative distortions-causative suggestions

Success of challenge is defined as the replacement of the original narrative text by another which is more historically accurate, and which enjoys greater exposure and currency-readership acceptance. Apart from searches in literary and historical references I also established currency by internet searches using the key words “biography” and the subject’s name. The texts displayed were chosen as the logical primary text for other comparisons.

Challenge was identified by published criticism of the text through media reports, literary and academic texts, or by persons in other media (online, interviews, radio, and television) and where clearly identifiable errors were deliberate and not admissible under Grice’s maxims, but which were clearly meant to deceive.

Findings:

The research question consisted of two parts. The first was whether omissions could be identified in the original text. The second was whether these omissions were successfully challenged by scrutiny: this scrutiny was in the form of textual responses, media or public criticism, or in internet incidences relating to the source text.

Significantly, minor omissions were identified in the majority of texts, but these omissions were not significantly challenged overall. By contrast, where major omissions were identified, the majority were not successfully challenged. Most significantly in the category of major omissions, no successful challenges were mounted against texts dominating the category of dramatic or scholarly (academic) life writing. It would appear that Shakespeare’s historical plays occupy a category similar, for instance, to the biopic; in that they are read contextually as creative works with ideological premises against the powerful
meaning of a real life lived and narrated. In less than a quarter of all texts, successful challenges were mounted to the overthrow of the original text by alternative life writing accounts of that subject.

The nature of the challenges indicated that a high cultural literacy exists in the readership of life writing, as expressed in a tolerance of subjectivity and creativity: if those elements are explicitly signalled by the author. There was also a direct co-relation between categories of texts where the framing of the text is most overtly C (creative), rather than L (literary) or H (historical). This in turn indicates that the generic signification of a text is entirely linked to its acceptance, regardless of the degree of omission. Again, the overt signification of generic integrity is critical to tolerance of creativity or subjectivity.

The texts that were successfully challenged were most typically texts where the pact, maxims and co-operative principle were flouted (not violated). In these cases, the tolerance of subjectivity does not extend to outright manipulation of the generic signification of the text.

Table of challenge outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major omissions</th>
<th>Minor omissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not challenged</td>
<td>not challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 (17)*: 12</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>Challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates novels, dramas (and “academy” life writing which is largely unread outside the academy: Sartre, Eagleton, Greer, Proust, Joyce).
Appendix D: Thematic review of data contributors (K G Hale biography)

Sample documents and summary of interviewing process for biography of K G Hale (1920-1991): political activist, local and state politician, businessman, charity worker, ecclesiastical minister, WW II veteran, family man and my late father.

Aims of the study
The original research project was the generation of biographical data for the production of a formal biographical text of the life of K G Hale. This then became a study of the nature of the data collection process itself, with special regard for the evidence within the data pointing to contestation of memory by participants.

Research Questions
The special interest in the study was the nature of how contestation over memory in the context of data collection for a biography is manifested through the actual responses. Attention was paid to the discourse analysis of utterances exhibiting power relations in regard to the potential power differentials involving age, relationship to subject and biographer, religion, social status, gender, political affiliation, education and occupation.

Methodology:
Demographic data was obtained from all participants. Questionnaires were supplied in advance to each participant, but responsive questioning occurred as an integral part of the interview. Open-ended questioning was managed by participant and interviewer according to power differentials and topic management. One topic was the respondent’s awareness of biographical texts and their function-purpose.

Focus groups were defined by relationship to K G Hale: categorised by family, religion, political association, work, business, lobbyist, friendship, charity, sporting membership (etc). FG Example: “daughters-in-law”. Groups were limited to a maximum of 6 persons to allow for ease of discussion and turn-taking, notation (etc).

Ethics clearance from the University of Western Sydney Human Subjects Ethics Committee was obtained, and all participants were provided with interviewer, research authentication and signed consent forms before participating. Participants agreed to ownership of material passing to UWS. Notation was referred to participants prior to tabling for final acceptance as being accurate.

Data collection and analysis:
This research study consists of an ethnographic face to face interviewing of 126 persons for the preparation of the biography of K G Hale. The data was collected through individual interviews and focus groups, with notation
simultaneously and directly taken. The questions were prepared and were also responsive to the data itself. Analysis was performed through discourse analysis, for the propositional content of utterances and the prosodic elements of the utterances contextually.

Participants
Participants were self-identified or nominated by other participants; others were directly approached. An open invitation/letter was sent out to each. They were further identified by category of relationship to the subject and directly or indirectly interviewed by email, person to person, letter, focus groups or telephone.

The participants and mode of contact are listed in table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to subject</th>
<th>Person interviewed</th>
<th>Mode of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original nuclear family</td>
<td>2: surviving brothers</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal nuclear family</td>
<td>8: Wife, 7 children. One child not formally consulted after identification as vulnerable person, however he is included as reported comments made to other family members are admissible.</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>27: wife’s family, nieces and nephews, daughters and sons in law, adult grandchildren.</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military service</td>
<td>23: surviving members of the 2/22nd Battalion (Lark Force)</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-business</td>
<td>13: employees, management, sales representatives, contractors, suppliers.</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political association</td>
<td>19: aldermen, mayor, state and federal politicians, barristers, solicitors, judge, lobbyists.</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>18: ecclesiastical superiors, parishioners, other denominations clergy.</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity and community</td>
<td>9: Rotary club, sporting groups, chamber of</td>
<td>Face to face, phone, letter, email.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
commerce.
7: neighbours, friends, acquaintances, newspaper and television reporters

Others

Face to face, phone, letter, email.