

The biography's time

In recent years, the genre of biography has become one of the centers of academic interest in Humanities courses. Its interdisciplinary nature, between history and literature, requires the concurrence of other disciplines (anthropology, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis ...) and the theoretical reflections that allow to satisfy the analytical and knowledge requirements of intellectual work.

We live the golden age of biography, at least as far as the Western world is concerned. That is what Nigel Hamilton supports in the opening of his book *How to do Biography* (Harvard University Press, 2008). The interest in real life is present in all media (cinema, television, the press, the internet), monopolizes editorial news and finally is entering the academic world as a discipline that, embedded between history and literary creation, facilitates the interpretation of individual, past or present human life. However, the delay or slowness with which this incorporation is taking place, at least in the Ibero-American context, is a bit disappointing given the immense contribution that biographical writing has provided to the world of knowledge and culture. That is why *Letras de Hoje* sought to dedicate a monographic number about the genre, bringing together a group of scholars in such field of study, to provide different perspectives of approximation and analysis on the subject of biography.

In front of the autobiography, which has concentrated the most important literary debate of the last twenty years – mention is made of two foundational theoretical books: the publication of Philippe Lejeune's *Le pacte autobiographique* in 1975 and Paul de Man's "Autobiography as De-Facement", originally published in *Modern Language Notes* (1979) and reprinted in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984). Well, faced with the theoretical emergence of autobiography as a writing that proposes core problems in relation to truth, character creation or self-referentiality, biography is a scripture which only deserved interest for literary theory, and very little for historiography, in spite of handling concepts and tools fundamental to its hermeneutics and of great

epistemological interest, such as its use of sources, the selection of sources, the point of view of the biographer, the biographical-biographical relation. The most basic fact of the whole biography, the knowledge of the character to be biographed, opens up a huge problem for itself, because the task of investigating, which may be a more or less optional work in other disciplines and writings, is the heart of the biography, which truly distinguishes the practice of so-called lifes-writing from fiction writing.

The biography, however, requires an adequate humus to develop. It requires freedom and a democratic spirit that accepts the possibility of revising the uniqueness of a human trajectory without spurious constraints that determine its objectives. No falsehoods and impostures. This revision of the past is indispensable in the Humanities, our reason for being as a discipline. A society in which biographies can not be written is almost unthinkable, at least on the western side, and yet we do not teach the study and composition of biography in university education. Until recently the study of the biographies was completely ignored and it was not part of the study plans, the bibliographies and the academic works. This makes it very difficult to evaluate a work, an unpublished investigation from others works that are not. There has been so little theory generated by the practice of biography that we even have a canon, a consensus on the books that marked the advancement of the genre. For all this, the need to boost the biographical studies justify the publication of this monographic number of *Letras de Hoje*.

This number contributes, in a way, to fill the still existing void about the theory and praxis of the biography, especially in the Essays section, the basis of the dossier on the subject. This section consists of a set of texts produced by authors integrated with different educational institutions in Europe, especially in Spain and the Americas, which, distanced by geography, show that they have common interests in their research. Geographically, from Spain, locus of study more attentive and dedicated to the subject of the biography, especially through the Unit of Biographical Studies, of the University of Barcelona,

coordinated by Anna Caballé, come two studies: one, written by Anna Caballé and the other written by Jodi Gracia. Also from Spain, we have the text of María Jesús González, from Universidad de Cantabria, and the essay of Rafael Andugar Sousa.

From South America, especially from the University of La República, in Uruguay, two authors are enrolled in the list of scholars of the biography: Pablo Rocca and Juan Carlos Albarado. From the other end of the Americas, now at York University, we present the contribution of Adrian Schubert. It should be noted with satisfaction that the scholars of Brazil, a country that is an open field for the writing of biographies, but that little explores this field in literary studies, also mark their presence in this issue with four articles, from different study centers: Cândida de Oliveira and Tânia Regina Oliveira Ramos, from the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina; Everton Barbosa Correia, from the Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro; Marilene Weinhardt, Universidade Federal do Paraná and Fábio Varela Nascimento, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul.

The spectrum of topics addressed by these scholars, located at different points in the Americas and Spain, in particular, is interesting and significant for the knowledge of the current state of the art in the writing and praxis of biography. Anna Caballé, author of several biographies and specialist in the subject, in her book “The horizons epistemológicos de la biografía”, she focuses on an issue that moves her theoretical formulations on the writing of biographies: the degree of objectivity of the biographer on the biographical matter. If we extend the discussion, it will fall on the evolution of the biography in Spain, a subject that Anna Caballé has researched for some years and which she has produced some original contributions. In this same field, Rafael Andugar Sousa proposes to create a new literary genre from the reading of different literary works, in the article “Breves biografías ficticias. Posibilidad de un novo género literariolecorial”. Jodi Gracia, in “Imaginación moral y biografía” focuses his discussion on the topic of moral imagination as an instrument to recreate the inner complexity of biographical subjects.

María Jesús González, in “*God save the Queen*, consideraciones en torno a la biografía en Gran Bretaña”, brings important considerations on the biographical genre in Great Britain, country that has become an international reference in this field of studies. According to this author, the English biography took other directions from the moment in which the English biographers transcended its borders and began to deal with the biographies of personages of other nationalities. The reflections in this study refer not only to the history of the genre in Great

Britain, but also to the problems faced by biographers in their relations with new cultural circles of biographical investigation.

From Toronto, Adrian Schubert explores the ways in which historians have thought biography as a genre of writing about the past in his article “What do historians really think about biography?” According to his proposal, the way historians treated the biography, was responsible for a change of understanding of the genre in the last fifty years. To discuss his proposal, he brings to the fore the biography of the Spanish military and politician, Baldomero Espartero (1793-1879).

Another block, more focused on the praxis of biography, that is, in studies that re-examine biographical texts or even biographies of illustrious or peripheral characters, brings together the largest set of articles. Pablo Rocca brings to light, in Orsini Bertani’s “Vida y milagros de Orsini Bertani (una semblanza: quehaceres de la cultura letrada del Novecientos)”, a notable figure in the history of Uruguay – Orsini Bertani – a man who circulated between papers and books, but whose origin goes back to the activities like anarchist in its native country, Italy, until arriving at the Uruguayan capital, where it became a cultural entrepreneur, whose paper has repercussions for the educated formation of the country. Another personality of this same environment is studied by Juan Carlos Albarado, in “Tabaré Etcheverry, un breve cantar”. He is a national singer who revolutionized music in Uruguay and, besides issues of musical aesthetics, also involves political issues, responsible for creating a black legend about this singer and composer.

From the Brazilian space, the contributions are also varied and focus on the praxis of the biography with its articulations with the new media, history and culture, that is, the problems related to its referentiality, the impact of feminism on the evolution of gender and foundational models for contemporary biography. In “A produção de subjetividades no romance e na entrevista midiática: rastros do autobiográfico e da escrita feminista de Maria Valéria Rezende”, Cândida de Oliveira and Tânia Regina Oliveira Ramos analyze the production of subjectivities in contemporary Brazilian literature, focusing on the construction of the biography of Maria Valéria Rezende, through the fictional work and writer and media resources. Marilene Weinhardt takes a picture of Brazilian history, the rich and intelligent Eufrása Teixeira Leite, a descendant of the national aristocracy, an independent woman, who maintained an involvement with the abolitionist politician Joaquim Nabuco, focusing his analysis on two novels that take this female figure as a character. In “Eufrása Teixeira Leite: personagem biográfica romanceada”, the article associates romance and biography to discuss the fiction from the biographical data. Still from Brazil, the study by

Fábio Varela Nascimento deals with a unique personality from Rio Grande do Sul, the physician and writer Cyro Martins, to recover the years of his formation, in “A tentativa biográfica: o desafio de escrever parte da vida de Cyro Martins”, object of his doctoral thesis, recently presented at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul. Closing this block, the article “Dicção individual e intervenção pública em ‘Três sonetos positivos’, by Joaquim Cardoso”, Everton Barbosa Correia proposes that the sonnet would be the locus of manifestation of a singular voice, little considered by the Brazilian literary historiography.

The Free Section opens its pages to welcome the study of Ana Fernandes and João Queiroz, entitled “O altersense do haicai” and the reflection of Luciana Abreu

Jardim, “Deslocamentos do imperativo visual em recortes do feminismo”.

At the end, it remains to thank the organizers of this volume of *Letras de Hoje* thank the authors for their collaboration to include their articles in this issue, opening the way to new theoretical and practical challenges in the field of biography. We wish everyone – readers, researchers and interested parties in general – to enjoy good reading times!

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