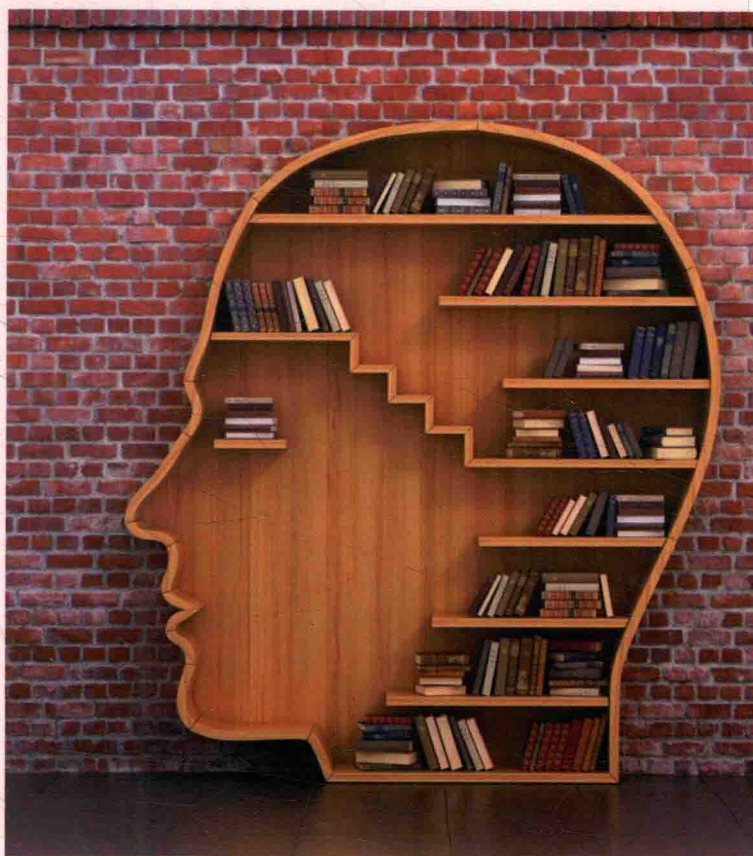


No. 6, Spring 2016

■ 第6辑

■ 2016年春季号

现代传记研究



Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies

上海交通大学传记中心主办

Center for Life Writing, SJTU

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商务印书馆
The Commercial Press

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商务印书馆
The Commercial Press

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

现代传记研究. 第6辑 / 杨正润主编. —北京: 商务印书馆, 2016

ISBN 978-7-100-12264-1

I. ①现… II. ①杨… III. ①传记—研究
IV. ①K810

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2016)第 117394 号

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Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies VI / Yang Zhengrun

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现代传记研究

第6辑

杨正润 主编

商务印书馆出版

(北京王府井大街36号 邮政编码100710)

商务印书馆发行

山东临沂新华印刷物流集团

有限责任公司印刷

ISBN 978-7-100-12264-1

2016年6月第1版 开本 710 × 1000 1/16

2016年6月第1次印刷 印张 17.5

定价: 40.00 元

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卷首语

传记(life writing)是人类的纪念碑。文化的起源中就包含着传记的因素,孔子的《论语》、柏拉图的苏格拉底回忆录和“四福音书”为传记树立了不朽的经典。其他文学和文化的文本形式,大都随着时代的变迁而消亡,成为历史的陈迹,只有传记以顽强的生命力绵延不绝;到了21世纪更是超过曾经盛极一时的小说,成为文化文本中的最大类别。传统的他传、自传、回忆录、书信、日记、游记等继续繁荣,新兴的口述历史、群体传记又异军突起。传记还超越了文字的媒介,同电影、电视以及互联网和自媒体结缘,开拓出广阔的新空间,拥有难以计量的读者。越来越多的人为自己、为亲爱者写作传记,以保留一份纪念。21世纪是属于传记的时代。

传记的发展,提出了许许多多的问题,需要研究和讨论;本刊是中国境内第一个专门研究传记的刊物,创办本刊的目的就是提供一个发表和交流的园地,为中国传记的发展聊尽绵薄之力。

在一个全球化的时代,《现代传记研究》是一个开放性的刊物。它向中外传记界开放,它发表对各种传记类型的问题,包括历史的、现实的和理论的问题,所进行的不同角度的研究和探讨;它鼓励和欢迎专家、作者和读者之间的交流和互动;它提倡视角和方法与时俱进、不断创新,同时也倡导严谨、求实的文风。它的目的只有一个,促进传记学术的繁荣,推动传记的发展。

办好一份刊物是一件艰苦的事,我们会不断学习、不断反思、不断改善以求进步。我们也吁求国内外传记界的朋友们、传记爱好者的支持,你们的关注和参与,你们的能力和智慧,是办好这份刊物最有力的保证,期待着你们!

《现代传记研究》编辑部

Editor's Note

As a monument to honor human beings, life writing has permeated culture since its origin. *Analects of Confucius* by Confucius, Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, and *The Four Gospels* are immortal classics in the history of life writing. Despite the fact that many genres of literature and culture perish over time, life writing has persisted in a tenacious manner, and the twenty-first century is witnessing a golden age of life writing, which even surpasses the novel, the once-dominating genre. Life writing now is among the most esteemed of cultural texts. Such traditional forms as biography, autobiography, memoirs, letters, diary and travel writing still maintain prominence and the emerging oral history and collective lives demonstrate great momentum. Simultaneously, life writing, having crossed the border of textual medium into the domain of movies, TV, Internet and We Media, claims an ever new and extensive space with the potential for innumerable readers. An increasing number of people have taken to life wiring for themselves or for their loved ones, aspiring to erect an everlasting monument. In brief, the twenty-first century is an era of life writing.

Life writing as a genre of discourse has posed a great number of questions, requiring energies devoted to deeper studies and thorough scholarly discussions. The *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies* takes the initiative in China as the first journal exclusively devoted to life writing studies. It aims to make a distinctive contribution to the development of Chinese life writing by providing a forum for publication and exchange of views in scholarship.

In the context of globalization, the *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies* is an open journal, accessible to the life writing community home and abroad, publishing research and explorations on all kinds of life writing issues (historical, practical and theoretical) from various perspectives, encouraging and welcoming communication and interaction among scholars, authors and readers, and highlighting innovative perspectives and methodologies as well as rigorous and realistic style. Our over-arching commitment is to facilitate the development of life writing and to bring it to a new level of excellence.

A full-fledged journal requires arduous and painstaking efforts. We pledge to consistently aim for progress through consistent learning, reflection, and improvement. We also appeal to dear friends in the life writing community at home and abroad and devotees of life writing for your support, attention and participation. Your talents and wisdom are the most powerful assurance of our success. We are looking forward to your help!

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The Craftsmanship of Life Writing

Nigel Hamilton

In the area of life writing in China, the biographer Nigel Hamilton is not a new name. His *JFK: Reckless Youth* was translated into Chinese in 1999 in Mainland China and has since been highly acclaimed. He was reviewed in the leading Chinese literature studies newspaper *Literature and Art* for his *Biography: A Brief History* in 2008. In the following interview with this distinguished biographer, which took place via email during July, 2015, Nigel Hamilton talks about how he looks at life writing.

1. Would you please brief your own experience working in the field of life writing? What are your lessons from it?

My first biography was *The Brothers Mann*, which I finished in 1973. It took five years to get it published (1978), as it was considered too long. But it was deeply satisfying to research and write: a wonderful opportunity to learn about another culture (German), and to find an original way of telling not one, but *two* life-stories-which I did by telling their stories in alternate chapters. Many lessons learned from that-and the next twenty-five books I have written!

2. Would you please give us an overview of the life writing development in your country in recent years? What are the success and problems? Could you recommend one or two of the life writings published in recent years? What is the worth do you think?

I have tried to address the most important changes in recent biography in my *Biography-A Brief History*, but also a new essay, "Biography as Corrective," which will be published next year in Hans Renders's collection of new essays, *The Biographical Turn*. In this I have outlined a new rationale or theoretical justification for modern biography.

3. Would you please give us an overview of life writing theories popular in recent years in your country? What issues concern the life writing theorists most in your country? What are the leading works in life writing theories in recent years?

See Hans Renders and Binne de Haan's edited volume *Theoretical Discussions of*

Biography (Brill: 2014).

- 4. Are you satisfied with the life writing theories people are interested most in recent years? Are they helpful to life writing? What issues do you think life writing theories should explore?**

There has been, in my view, far too much concentration on memoir, and almost nothing on biography. While this has doubtless helped students to write Blogs and even memoirs themselves, it has done very little for biography as the study of other people's real lives.

- 5. More fictitious elements are added into life writing in a great many works now. In some cases, even important characters or events are invented. Some biographers even made believe the stories that he befriended with the late biographical subject. Do you approve of this method? Is this the trend? How do you define auto/biographical truth?**

The trend towards fictionalizing documentary, in the interests of more entertaining or accessible storytelling, is neither new nor likely to diminish. Fortunately it has not really infected serious biography, in print. "Narrative non-fiction" and fiction-based-on-real-figures (such as Robert Harris's *A Spy* and *A Gentleman*-a dramatized version of the infamous Dreyfus case) seem to be absorbing the public demand for drama, while serious biographers ply their ancient trade, though with new structural, storytelling and stylistic techniques (flashback, etc, etc). I wonder whether, in the history of the novel, there has ever been a period in which writers have so turned to biography for their characters, their plots, their dramas, as today?

Doubtless this phenomenon can be quantitatively as well as qualitatively surveyed. But in the meantime it may be worth asking why, if this is truly the case, this turn should be so pronounced? Does it imply a dearth of imagination on the part of novelists? Or does it, rather, reflect a kind of heightened fascination today with the real-as we see also in the growth of "non-fiction narrative," as it is called, where supposedly true stories are made into entertaining dramas that can tease our love of suspense, of heroism, of tough competition? Or, could it be that fiction writers who tackle "real life stories," or use real-life figures in their work, are dissatisfied with the biographies they read-feeling that biographers either fail to capture adequately the drama of the story or the dilemmas of the characters, thus causing the fiction writer to cry out to be allowed to speculate, and invent?

Interviewing actual fiction writers who have gone down this path will give us a better idea, for our knowledge is still today rather slim, and our efforts to understand the intersection between biography and fiction even slimmer.

Thirty years ago Ira Nadel attempted an analysis, in his book *Biography*:

Fiction, Fact and Form (St. Martins, 1984). Nadel was minded to see “fictional biography” as an experimental response to the increasing instability of fact, following the tsunami of literary deconstruction. If the factualness of fact be questioned, then the authorial stance, too, must be unstable—a situation Nadel neatly described as “mimesis versus invention.” Unfortunately Nadel did not undertake or quote interviews with practicing novelists or biographers, and was only able, given his remit at the time, to devote three pages out of 236 to the matter.

The biographical world has moved on a great deal since then, however. For example the prolific biographer Carl Rollyson, in his book *Biography: A User's Guide* (Ivan Dee, 2009), paid tribute to Joyce Carol Oates's *Blonde*, a fictionalized biography of Marilyn Monroe. Rollyson was delighted to see his own biography of Monroe in the bibliography, and applauded her “reading” of Monroe's life, which agreed largely with his own. “I also saw that in at least one respect Oates had surpassed me,” he acknowledged, however. “Her evocation of Monroe's childhood is haunting. The novelist creates scenes—more than could be done with fact alone—in which Monroe's harrowing encounters with her violently unstable mother create a disequilibrium. If I were to write my biography of Monroe again,” he confessed, “I know that the level of my engagement with Monroe's childhood would be much greater because I have read Oates.” (Rollyson, 115)

Now such an admission certainly illustrates the two-way interaction, or potential interaction, between fiction and non-fiction. But does it change the essential difference between the two genres—or rather, between the motivations impelling novelists and biographers?

Instinct or intuition tells me, no. While waiting for more serious interviews to be done with the writers of fictional biography, let me hazard a guess: namely that the answer is to be found less in the experimental creative intersection between biography and fiction (despite the many decades of examples, stemming from Virginia Woolf's spoof biography, *Orlando*), and more in an analysis of the novelistic *Ursprung*, or drive and inspiration.

The biographer, we know, proceeds from a desire to understand and record the reality of another person's life, as it was lived, and as best as this can be researched and truthfully determined—knowing the facts may be unstable, yet the truth nevertheless be worth pursuing. Moreover the biographer's further motive, beyond the matter of a better understanding and record, is to form a judgment of the chosen subject—whether overtly or by selecting facts and insight that will allow the reader to make his or her own assessment. As Hermione Lee rightly pointed out in her book, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009), “Biography is a form of history”—in fact Number 7 of Lee's “10 Rules of

Biography.” Biography, in this respect, is a reflection of what, in a society, we “value,” what “we care about,” in the shape of who we choose to remember as society’s “visible” and “invisible” men and women.

Understanding, recording, *valuing*—these are the biographer’s essential motivations, and are thus surely quite distinct from that which impels fiction writers. Novelists are seldom interested in society’s valuation of a real person so much as their own interpretation of what interests them in it, as storytellers and inventors. As Rollyson recognized, even the little that Oates knew of Marilyn’s childhood had evoked tremendous compassion in her fecund mind, causing her to use the known facts of Monroe’s life as a starting point. The fictional Monroe became, for her, a crucible: a preliminary form into which she was able to pour her imagination and insight into all human nature, focused on this one supposedly “real,” yet largely invented character. Her aim was not to record a “truer” account of Monroe’s childhood, but a more *moving* account of a childhood, once fictionalized.

The outcome of such fictionalizing is, in many ways, a bonus for the reader who reads both Rollyson’s biography and Oates’s dramatized version. The reader’s ultimate feeling for, and judgment of, Marilyn Monroe becomes, in this instance, a conflation of the biographer’s factually-based judgment and the novelist’s emotional insight-yet the two approaches to the task, and the driving force impelling them, are and remain completely different.

Again, let us look more closely at what this means in terms of the biographer. In potentially rewriting his version of Marilyn Monroe, Rollyson claims he would have explored more of Monroe’s childhood: recognizing a significance, a weight, a psychological key to the later life that he had perhaps underestimated. But he would still not have been keen, let alone driven, to follow Oates’s path and invent a Marilyn beyond that which can truthfully be researched and determined-for that is not what drives him as biographer. It is just that, thanks to Oates’s intuitive insight, he would appraise Monroe’s childhood differently within his larger judgment of her life and its public value, *pace* Hermione Lee. Marilyn would remain for him the “real” Marilyn whom he would have been driven to record *even more* truthfully, if possible-not the pursuit of an Oates fantasy, however brilliantly imagined, or moving in its portrait of a type, a tragic woman who was both a beneficiary of modern life and its victim.

Where does this leave us? Historical valuation, or re-valuation, in the public mind, is clearly a determining motive in writing biography-but not in fiction, where the attraction is the life’s *generic* interestingness, and the opportunity to tell a moving or dramatic story.

Having said this, however, we have to acknowledge that there are cases where a novelist *does* seek to value, or revalue, a historical personage, even their

agency in history, in the public consciousness. Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) comes to mind—a chilling version of what is known in the trade as “counterfactual history,” or “what if?” In the novel, Roth posited a different historical outcome to the machinations of the isolationist and leader of the America First movement in 1940: the celebrated U. S. airman Charles Lindbergh. Yet even as a counterfactualer, Roth is more interested in dramatizing the outcome of a Lindbergh America on Roth's Jewish fictional hero—or version of himself. Roth has certainly contributed to the revaluing of the historical and social danger posed, had Lindbergh become president—but in following that path he did not attempt to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of Lindbergh himself. (Lindbergh's real life was even more extraordinary than Roth could have invented: supporting eugenics and maintaining the public fiction of a loving marriage to the poet Anne Morrow Lindbergh, while secretly running a harem of disabled German mistresses, by whom he sired more children. Ah, the complexities of human behavior!)

My current favorite in fictional biography is, I must say, another exploration of anti-Semitism, drawn from real life: Robert Harris's *An Officer and a Spy* (2013). Here Harris retells the story of the Alfred Dreyfus treason case, seen from the point of view of a dramatized head of the French military intelligence bureau, Georges Picquart. It is a tour de force in terms of storytelling, and very moving in its depiction of nefarious bureaucracy and jingoism—but it is no biography of Dreyfus, nor is it meant to be.

Which [*sic*] makes me wonder whether, in terms of analysis, there is a closer relationship between fiction and “non-fiction narrative” than between biography and fiction.^①

6. **The genre of life writing has long been disputed. The controversy centers on whether it is a branch of history or a branch of literature. Some also claim that it should be an independent genre. What is your opinion on this debate?** Definitely biography should be an independent interdisciplinary discipline—and be taught as such.
7. **With the increase of memoir, diary, letters and oral history, these sub-genres exert greater influence than auto/biography. What is your comment on this phenomenon? Should they be included in biography or autobiography? Why?** Such subgenres do not constitute biography—but they definitely fuel it, and are

^① Most of this part also appears on the website THE BIOGRAPHY SOCIETY LA SOCIÉTÉ DE BIOGRAPHIE, entitled “Biography and Fiction,” Feb. 9, 2016. <<http://biography-society.org/>>