

Call for papers

LA VÉRITÉ D'UNE VIE : BIOGRAPHY & VERITY

Interdisciplinary Colloquium of Federation CRISIS

Biography Society <http://biographysociety.org>

Maison de la Recherche - Aix-Marseille Université - 20-21 octobre 2017

LERMA (EA 853) – CAER (EA 854) – IrASIA (UMR 7306)



The Biography Society
La Société de Biographie



CAER
Centre Aixois d'Études Romanes



Biography entertains a peculiar relationship to the notion of verity. Indeed, in science and in the humanities alike, truth appears to us today as a construction, always conveyed by a discourse ; indeed, verity is an unattainable horizon, an object of desire that keeps receding on and on as we strive to get closer to it, but the very quest ceaselessly modifies the landscape of our knowledge. The recent development of 'biofiction' can be interpreted as a 'biographisation' of contemporary fiction, which characterises our time, and is comparable to the 'novelisation' of genres one century ago. This phenomenon is what Hans Renders, Binne de Haan et Jonne Harmsma investigate in *The Biographical Turn : Lives in History* (Routledge, 2016). In historiography and philosophy of history, Hayden White's theses, especially in *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) clearly pose the problem of the partly fictional, and in any case literary nature of historiography. Biography, commonly described as a hybrid genre, between history and literature (see Michael Benton, *Toward a Poetics of Literary Biography*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), is distinguished by a peculiar aesthetics; it is assessed (by readers, critics, and the juries of literary awards) by the double standard of the verity of the knowledge it conveys, and the quality of the style in which it is expressed. A biographer is expected, on the one hand, to administrate the proof of what she writes in her texts and paratexts, and, on the other hand, to do so while producing a text where the pleasure to read must satisfy the desire to know: where scientific quest and aesthetic experience cross-fertilize one another. The most interesting biographers are those for whom literary writing is not a mere form but their very method, the very path of their thinking towards a better understanding of their subject. Mixing memory and desire, scientific truth and literary verity, biography is a peculiar field, a crossroads of humanities, where a significant turn is taking place. The biographic turn partakes of a reprise, a new start, a reorientation of writing and reading towards this verity, always surprising, of which we cannot but see that it is the text that our lives are made of.

Contributions can propose theoretical reflexions on the notion of verity in biography, or case studies, interrogating for instance the political uses of biography to inflect the "truth" about a person in the eyes of the public, addressing methods of investigation and verification of the facts, or analysing literary, rhetorical, strategies of administration of the proof. They can also be studies of the paratexts (footnote, prefaces, postfaces, documentary appendixes, etc.), or of the iconographic illustrations, taking especially into account the impact of photography. Considerations on the cinema are also expected, investigating the special relationship of biographical films to historical truth. In the field of digital humanities, the truth effect of on-line biographical notices and dictionaries of biography, as well as the impact of digital tools on biographical research are a case in point. Papers should also address fictionalisation as a method of construction to fill in the gaps of documentation.

Proposals, in French or in English, with a provisional title, an abstract no longer than 100 words, and 5 key-words, should be sent before February 1st, 2017, to Pr Yannick Gouchan yannick.gouchan@univ-amu.fr and Pr Joanny Moulin joanny.moulin@univ-amu.fr.