

ARTICLE

The biographical turn and the case for historical biography

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Abstract

Biography has long been ostracized from the academy while remaining a popular genre among the general public. Recent heightened interest in biography among academics has some speaking of a biographical turn, but in Canada historical biography continues to be undervalued. Having not found a home in any one discipline, Biography Studies is emerging as an independent discipline, especially in the Netherlands. This Dutch School of biography is moving biography studies away from the less scholarly life writing tradition and towards history by encouraging its practitioners to utilize an approach adapted from microhistory. In response to these developments, this article contends that the discipline of history should take concrete steps to strengthen the subfield of Historical Biography. It further argues that works written in this tradition ought to chart a middle path between those studies that place undue focus on either the individual life or on broader historical questions. By employing a critical narrative approach, works of Historical Biography will prove valuable to both academic and non-academic readers alike.

The border separating history and biography has always been uncertain and anything but peaceful. (Loriga, 2014, p. 77)

Being in the midst of a PhD dissertation that has its roots in extensive biographical research, I was advised to include in my introduction an overview of theoretical approaches to biography. Little did I know the challenge this task presented. Preliminary searches turned up very little, mostly articles that consisted of biographers ruminating on what to do and what not to do when writing a biography. Much of this was superficial or consisted of thinly disguised self-aggrandizement that was neither theoretical nor helpful (cf. de Haan & Renders, 2014, p. 17). Eventually I found Barbara Caine's excellent primer on the subject, in which she explained that little had been written in the way of biographical theory (Caine, 2010, pp. vii, 1). I repeated as much in a draft of my introduction, but my supervisor was sceptical. Surely there had to be more going on with biography—dig deeper, he urged.

So I began anew and quickly found biography has been ostracized from the academy for a long time (see Loriga, 2014, pp. 75–89). Many pieces on biography open by referencing Stanley Fish's famous denouncement of all biography as “minutiae without meaning” (Fish, 1999). As it turns out, such criticism continues. Nearly a decade later, Steve Weinberg (2008) observed that biography was still regarded as “the Bastard Child of Academe” but argued it was time for biography to “bust out.” The following year historian David Nasaw offered a somewhat softer version of this

critique: "Biography remains the [historical] profession's unloved stepchild," he remarked, adding that the characterization of biography as "a lesser form of history" was widespread (Nasaw, 2009, p. 573). While interest has certainly grown since then, biographers will be thrilled to learn that as late as 2014 historians were still asking whether or not biography could be considered a serious contribution to history (Snowman, 2014). As Caine (2010) put it, despite "the widespread recognition amongst historians of the importance and popularity of biography, many of them continue to express considerable ambivalence about it" (p. 7). This is perhaps putting it lightly. Biography still holds such a stigma in the discipline that, Nasaw (2009) notes, graduate students are "warned away from writing biographies as their dissertations" (p. 573). I too was warned against making my own dissertation "merely" a biography and was urged to adopt a more traditional approach. But, since my proposed dissertation was partially biographical in focus, I was also told that I had better include some remarks about the value of a biographical approach. "Considerable ambivalence" indeed!

Having surveyed much of the recent literature, I was left with three initial impressions. First, many academics speak of a resurgence in interest about biography. Caine (2010) remarked that current interest in biography was so great "that many scholars now talk of a 'biographical turn' in the humanities and social sciences" (vii; see, for example, Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraft, 2000). But scholars note the popularity of biography nearly every decade, and some biographers argue that a "biographical turn" in Europe commenced as early as the 1980s (Lässig, 2008, p. 3). So perhaps it is more accurate to say that there continues to be public interest in biography, interest that many academics now share.

My second impression is that in Canada, and despite this increased interest, biography is still viewed as "a lesser form of history," to use Nasaw's phrase (2009, p. 573). Some disagree with this statement, pointing out that Canadian historians continue to write biographies (see, for example, Dewar, 2015; Gauvreau, 2017; Hillmer, 2015; Little, 2013; Perry, 2015; Strong-Boag, 2015; Wright, 2015; Young, 2014). However, in the same breath they admit that it is generally late-career historians who are writing these biographies. A few mid-career historians have written biographies as well, but seemingly no emerging scholars (see, for example, Wright, 2015, 2007, 2005). The implication of this trend is clear: historical biography is not for the untenured.

That it is widely conceded that a work of historical biography is insufficient to establish oneself as a historian reveals a continuing undervaluation of the subfield (see Nasaw, 2009, p. 573). Another sign is the prevalence of the opinion that biography is an unsuitable choice for a PhD dissertation. Some make the argument that because most PhD students are young they have insufficient life experience to write an accurate biography. This strikes me as ageist, but in those cases when age might influence perception or interpretation the steadying hand of a supervisor or editor could surely help to mitigate its impact. Besides, limiting authorship on the basis of age (or gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.) would appear to be both illiberal and impractical.

Biographies have also been excluded as an acceptable genre for a dissertation on the grounds that they do not demonstrate an author's broad research skills. But just as historians, by and large, do not critique world history for having too broad a scope, for example, we should likewise not accuse biography of having too narrow a scope. In fact, biography requires broad and extensive archival research, for writing a work of historical biography requires an author to learn about the entire period in which their subject lived, often seventy or eighty years. They must also research every field their subject was involved in, every place they lived, and so on. As a result, the author must become conversant with a number of sometimes-disparate literatures, mastering or at least grappling with large sections of the historiography (see Rotberg, 2010, p. 307; Wright, 2007, pp. 20–21). It remains to be seen exactly how this is narrower than what is required for non-biographical dissertations. A final reason given for dissuading students from biography is the most honest: "a biography isn't going to do for you what you think it will on the academic job market," one professor told me bluntly (though I had made no claims one way or the other). And in the current academic job market, who would take that chance?

The place of biography within the Canadian historiography has never been adequately mapped, though it is clear that the high water mark was the 1960s. However, biographies during this period were focused mainly on politicians, and within a decade biography was being satirized as accounts of "dead white guys." (Henderson, 2004, p. 154; see also Berger, 1976, pp. 218–221; Mallory, 1980, pp. 125–128; Shore, 2002; Wright, 2015, pp. 173–203). Following

the American Historical Association roundtable on biography in 2009, the 2010 annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association held three separate panels on the “Biographical (Re)turn.” (This title alone suggests the appeal of historical biography had indeed declined in previous decades.) Of the papers subsequently published, only one by Roderick Barman made a case for “Biography As History”—and his was a cautious argument. He maintained that biography could be employed to further our understanding of history, but warned that it was also “a genre abounding in problems. It must be employed with much caution.” And biographers had to know their place, for “biography can make no claim to be central. It is a useful, but not essential [sic]” (Barman, 2010, pp. 72, 73). This begs two questions: How is the study of human lives *not* essential to the study of history? And what subfield of history does not have its drawbacks? Yet there is no record of Barman's argument having triggered a response from either side; so much for historical biography's “(re)turn.”

Indeed, I found few signs of any such a movement. For example, there are centres for biography in Austria, Australia, Germany, England, France, the Netherlands, and the United States, but there is none in Canada (Howes, 2017, p. 171; de Haan & Renders, 2014, footnote 24). Some Canadian historians replied that an equivalent was the Dictionary of Canadian Biography (DCB), a collaboration between the University of Toronto and l'Université Laval that dates to 1959. And it is true that, in recent years, it has worked to encourage discussions about biography (in 2014, for instance, the DCB and the University of Toronto jointly organized some sessions at annual CHA annual meeting, and since then they have also co-hosted a number of conferences on biography). But other countries have both centres for biographies and dictionaries of biography, in part because the two have different aims; a dictionary of biography is not as suited to engaging with broader historiographical debates as it is to telling the story of a life.

Another absence is teaching about biography. I could locate only three courses offered at Canadian universities, though perhaps others are not listed online (the situation is similar in America, see Weinberg, 2008). Then there is the case of the open-access *Journal of Historical Biography* (JHB). Hosted by the University of the Fraser Valley and launched in 2007, the JHB was Canada's only journal dedicated to the topic and one of few internationally. Indeed, authors abroad were responsible for a significant majority of the articles published in the journal, suggesting continued ambivalence about historical biography among some Canadian scholars during this period.¹ Given its minimal funding, the journal required an enormous amount of time from its small editorial staff who had other obligations and interests. As a result, they closed up shop in 2014. In short, if there truly was a biographical turn or return in Canada its influence has been difficult to detect.

Biography has never been fully embraced by any discipline, so some biographers have concluded that they simply need to chart their own course. The late Ben Pimlott entirely rejected the question of biography's relation to the discipline of history and suggested instead that it needed to “shake off its own inferiority complex, and establish independent credentials” (Pimlott, 1999, p. 33). My third impression is that this process is now underway. One example is the establishment of the Biography Institute at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. The publications emerging from this centre note the popularity of the broader field of life writing, but make a case for Biography Studies as a separate and independent discipline. Renders and de Haan (2014a) wrote much of this early material and, as one scholar later put it, the two share “a coherent vision, with definite assumptions and boundaries” (Howes, 2017, p. 170); for this reason I have dubbed this the Dutch School of biography. Rollyson (2013) neatly summarizes their three main assumptions: that Life Writing has challenged the integrity of biography; that biographers can benefit from the methods of microhistory; and that biography, like history, is essentially revisionist (rewritten by each generation).

Further, Renders and de Haan argue that Life Writing is too concerned with victims, and often portrays the experience of one individual as being representative of an entire group. This debate about Life Writing's supposed obsession with previously marginalized groups strikes me as an old one that has already been largely settled in the discipline of history with the rise of social history. But in addition to this “corrective agenda,” the two also allege that Life Writing has been unconcerned with rigorous primary and secondary research and has not adequately dealt with the broader historical context of its subjects, and here they are on firmer footing. The inclusion of inanimate objects as

subjects in Life Writing, to the point that de Haan (2017) has to argue that “it seems only reasonable to limit the subject matter...to the lives of human beings,” points to the very real need for some disciplinary norms (p. 180; see, for example, Smith & Watson, 2016).

Biography Studies combines both the practice of writing biography as well as the study of biography as a genre. Both of these topics are naturally of interest for both literary scholars and historians, but it is unclear how this combination constitutes an independent discipline. Frankly, its emergence should be concerning for historians. Many biographers deal with the lives of people who are deceased and so their works are inherently historical. If biographers are going to do the work of a historian they should have the training that a degree in the discipline provides. Worryingly, at least one student of who is writing a biography has actively avoided taking graduate coursework as they felt it would “provide little benefit” (Rollyson, 2017, p. 178).

Rather than tacitly supporting the establishment of biography as an independent discipline, historians should instead support the establishment of the subfield of Historical Biography. In the minds of some scholars, to argue “biography is a subfield of history” is to state the obvious (see, for example, Anastakis & Kelm, 2017, p. 294). Yet other historians have made the case that biography is an approach to history, not a subfield (that is, one can write works of social, political, or economic history from a biographical approach). But this amounts to splitting hairs, for there is often some overlap between categorization and methodology. In any case, I am not denying that the subfield exists but I am arguing that it has not been accorded much value as of late, and that this must change if historians are to have any hand in shaping the future of biographical writing. One first step is to trace the contours of the subfield of Historical Biography.

The involvement of humanity has long been the demarcation between the earth sciences and history; those studies that fell into the gray area in between were dubbed pseudo- or quasi-history (see Collingwood, 1946, p. 212). By extension, biography is an essential component of history, a reality recognized by many historians over the years. As P. B. Waite put it:

The supreme argument for biography as history now falls fairly into place. There are no forces; there are no movements; there are no trends: there are men and women. They make the forces, movements, and trends. They may behave differently as individuals, groups, or crowds; but...they are all human. (Waite, 1990, p. 494. For similar arguments see Banner, 2009; Barman, 2010; Rampersad, 1992; Rotberg, 2010)

Waite's argument is perhaps overly materialist but his overall point is well taken: even the most anti-anthropocentric historian would agree that there is no history without people.² For this reason, it is illogical that biography is still held to be somehow lesser, not fully accepted or valued by the discipline of history. For at its most basic, Historical Biography is simply bringing the tools of the historian to bear on a single life that has passed. Combining archival research, wide reading into the secondary literature, and sometimes oral history, good Historical Biography not only provides a detailed picture of “the internal context” but also examines broader historical (or “external”) context (Magnússon, 2017, p. 48). It avoids auto/biography (an approach that welcomes authorial interventions in the text, ostensibly stemming from agnosticism about the self/other division) and outright inventions, and stays within the commonly accepted disciplinary norms.

So far there have been two opposing approaches to biography among historians. The first group argues that biography is a way of addressing a larger historical question or theme, using individual lives as “lenses” to look through at events and processes (Kessler-Harris, 2009, p. 626; see also Tuchman, 1985). This is not to deny the value of works that prioritize a broader subject over the individual, but is to reiterate that they are not works of Historical Biography. Christopher Dummitt's *Unbuttoned* (Dummitt, 2017), for example, is effective in using Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's life, and particularly his diary, as a lens through which to explore broader changes in Canadian society, but it is more a book about biography (and society) than it is a biography. Indeed, it contains only a sketch of King's life and would not have been possible without the numerous academic biographies of King upon which it builds (see Dummitt, 2017). Similarly, some biographers in this group seek out characters who “manifest...historical forces” (Applegate, 2017, p. 189). However, to take that approach is to begin with an assumed thesis and to

treat people as little more than repositories for ideas; a closer examination of these lives-as-vessels would undoubtedly complicate whatever larger argument the author is trying to make.

The second group of historians contends that biography should focus on the life itself, with the larger context discussed only in a limited way; this has been called the “classical” biographical approach (see Lässig, 2004, p. 148; Lässig, 2008, pp. 13–14). In recent years it has been epitomized by biographers who follow the narrowest possible version of the microhistorical approach. Microhistory is a subfield of history that starts from the premise that studying objects on a smaller scale will reveal phenomena, or aspects of them, that would otherwise evade historians (Levi, 2001, p. 101). However, within microhistory there are two competing approaches. Most practitioners, such as István Szijártó, suggest that microhistory can help answer larger historical questions, while Sigurður Magnússon rejects this view and argues instead for what he calls “the singularisation of history” (Magnússon & Szijártó, 2013). Singularising history means that the historian is to “look inwards” and study all the aspects of events and phenomena in close detail, and to avoid looking outwards at the larger context. If a historian is studying a lower-class person in a village, for example, the scope of the study should not exceed the boundaries of the village. Yet by working with this small scale, Magnússon argues, the historian will reveal “how society really works in the course of people's lives” (Magnússon, 2017, pp. 48–49; see also Magnússon, 2003).

This appears rather naïve, for it ignores the reality that society (the inner workings of which the microhistorian is supposedly revealing) is shaped and influenced by larger forces and processes. This approach thus seemingly ignores the most basic historical insights derived from a host of other subfields or approaches—comparative history, international history, transnational history, and world history, to name but a few—and conflates acknowledging the interconnected nature of historical events and forces with subscribing to a “grand narrative.” Magnússon is correct in suggesting that the rejection of *histoire totale*, coupled with the rise of social history, has resulted in the fragmentation of historical scholarship, however, it does not follow that the best answer is to simply write about subjects as dots and refuse to connect them (Magnússon, 2017, p. 50; cf. Loriga, 2014, pp. 90–91). Further, Magnússon's singularisation may not be as novel as it first appears, for it seems to consist of taking an out-dated historiographical approach that strives to write exhaustive histories (incorporating all people, activities, ideas, etc.) and shrinking it down in scale, likely as a reaction to the postmodern critique (see Peltonen, 2014b; cf. Brown, 2014).

In summarizing these two approaches, we might say that one foregrounds the life and the other foregrounds the times. Having critiqued both, I now suggest that Historical Biography chart a middle course between these two extremes. Many debates about biography turn on the question of representativeness or distinctiveness: does the subject of the small study represent a larger whole, or were they distinct? Sabina Loriga (2017), summarizing Dilthey's insight, puts this argument to rest: “An individual cannot *explain* a group, a community or an institution, and conversely a group, a community or an institution does not make it possible to *explain* an individual. There is always a disparity between these two poles, and this disparity is inexhaustible” (p. 34). As such, Historical Biography should alternate its gaze between the subject and their context, exploring the ways in which they interact. In this way such works can examine both the life *and* the historical events and processes, and detail how their stories are interwoven (cf. Ginzburg, 2014, p. 157). This is not to return to “life and times,” but rather to try and strike a balance between “the singularisation of history” and those works in which groups, ideas, movements, and forces are placed in the foreground and obscure the reality of people's complex, contradictory, and messy lives.³

One other point should be addressed and that is the role of theory. Comments about biography's lack of theorization are commonplace. Hermione Lee (2009) notes that from the mid- to late twentieth century biography was widely considered to be under-theorized (p. 94). In the midst of critiquing Life Writing's lack of theory, Renders and de Haan confess that the “theoretical foundation of biography is, for that matter, not terribly solid either” (Renders & de Haan, 2014b, p. 4). Seeking to shore up the foundation (and perhaps in an attempt to bolster their emergent discipline's *bona fides*), they proposed an association with microhistory. They began with the solid premise that in order to “understand the whole, we have to understand the parts, but to understand them, we have to understand the whole. There is reciprocal dependence between these two operations.” However, they then went on to argue that microhistory has typically explored how individuals were representative, and counter that biography should instead

explore how individuals were distinctive and influenced their context (2014b, p. 6). Such was to be the theoretical association between microhistory and biography: building on the initial approach of a reduced scale of study, but stressing the exemplary over the representative.

After promoting this association, Renders and de Haan became aware of the competing microhistorical approaches (2014a, p. xv). In their earlier work, the Dutch School had rejected a narrow approach, similar to the one proposed by Magnússon, by stressing the need for biographers to concern themselves with historical context. Matti Peltonen (2014a) repeatedly argued that a microhistorical approach must be concerned with larger social structures else “the whole project of microhistory would be futile” (p. 114), while Renders (2014b) suggested that both biographers and microhistorians should ask how the meaning of a large historical narrative relates to a real life (p. 132). Yet for unstated reasons, in the second collection the editors included only an essay by Magnússon (2017), discussed above, and no representative from the opposing and broader microhistorical approach (Renders, de Haan, & Harmsma, 2017a).

But if microhistory is not the best theoretical foundation for biography, as I am suggesting, then what is to take its place? Historian Thomas L. Haskell memorably defined theory as “a freewheeling recognition that events are interrelated in more ways than are immediately apparent or carry the sanction of common usage” (Haskell, 1998, p. 6). Biography can be a way of validating or invalidating theories about broader topics (see Renders and de Haan, 2014b, p. 6), but I argue it does not require its own theorizing. For when trained historians write works of Historical Biography, they bring to the task whatever theoretical approach (about society, not biography) they find most convincing and beneficial.

Biography's narrative mode has formerly been viewed as lacking “the capacity to convey the kind of analytically sophisticated interpretation of the past” that historians demanded, but it has become increasingly obvious that this criticism is not universally valid (Nasaw, 2009, p. 573). Rather, works that employ a narrative approach, including biographies, are often critical, self-reflective, and explore the analytical categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and so on (Harders, 2004, p. 50). In this way the biographical turn has accompanied the return of the narrative mode, yet has been bolstered by the renewed distrust of master narratives.

I have argued that biography should not be an independent discipline, that it does not require theorizing, and that it should instead be welcomed as a subfield of history. While I have already conceded that not all historians will agree on this (there is little that every historian would agree on), I should also acknowledge that some biographers will oppose this proposal. Take, for instance, Nigel Hamilton's provocative essay “Biography as Corrective” (Hamilton, 2017). Lauded by the editors as “grasp[ing] an essential feature of biography as a critical method in the humanities” (Renders, de Haan, & Harmsma, 2017b, p. 10), the piece suggests that biography is not only distinct from history but is actually opposed to it.

Hamilton happily reports that in the last quarter century, the denigration of biography and the estimation of history have reversed:

traditional history, rather than biography, h[as] come under academic and public fire, while biography's status both in academic and outside may be said to have skyrocketed. The snobbery, superficiality, and lack of credibility of historians, where their work touches on real individuals, caused history in that period to become suspect not only in the academy but outside, as the work of biographers served increasingly to place in question their accounts and interpretations of important historical events, personalities and developments. (2017, p. 16)

Scholarly biographers, he writes later in the chapter, contest “the shallow accounts and myths paraded by many historians” (p. 21). Historians must be to blame for whatever current “myth” that the valiant biographer, after surveying the historiography and identifying it as a target, finds purpose in challenging. Hamilton alleges (with no apparent irony) that historians have an agenda that is guided by personal animosity, and that in their research they avoid, deny, and are selective (pp. 21, 23). The editors seem to agree, writing that the biographical approach puts “the deterministic and reductionistic tendency of writing history into perspective” and in doing so “calls attention to the complexity and

dynamics of human history," presumably in a way that historians who are not biographically focused do not (Renders et al., 2017b, p. 5; cf. Renders, 2014b, p. 134).

Hamilton paints a dark and unrealistic picture of history as a discipline filled with charlatans that has rightly lost the public's trust. In his account, historians do not write biographies, they become biographers. Historian Ian Kershaw is described as having changed professions when he authored a biography, and Niall Ferguson's decision to write a biography is portrayed as his "abandon[ing] history."⁴ Make no mistake, this is not about producing more accurate accounts of the past, this is actually a battle between competing fields (note his language of "arsenals" and "weaponry"). Returning to the case of Kershaw's award-winning biography, which presumably stands in for all of biography, Hamilton triumphantly declares: "Biography had clearly won over history" (Hamilton, 2017, pp. 17–21).

But standing back from the field of battle, it is clear that Hamilton's chapter serves to illustrate the success of a historical approach to biography rather than biography's success over history. Almost all the celebrated biographies that he mentions were written by trained historians and were recognized as histories. For her outstanding scholarship, Doris Goodwin was called "American's historian-in-chief," not its biographer-in-chief. And even in the midst of arguing that biography is distinct from history, Hamilton admits, albeit in a tortured way, that at least some of his works do contribute to history (he considers one of his volumes as having stood "history – that is to say, what historians write – on its head"; Hamilton, 2017, pp. 20, 22). But if biographers are producing revisionist histories, are they not, in fact, writing histories?

Renders and de Haan would likely agree, given that they have defined biography as "the study of the life of an individual, based on the methods of historical scholarship, with the goal of illuminating what is public, explained and interpreted in part from the perspective of the personal." They later state outright that "biography as a research area belongs to history" and that biography is "a variety of historiography" (Renders & de Haan, 2014b, pp. 3–4). And in their most recent work, subtitled "Lives in History," Renders, de Haan, and Harmsma describe biography as a "method of historical research" and a "distinct historical methodology" (Renders et al., 2017a, 2017b, pp. 4, 6, & 10, see also de Haan, 2017, p. 54).

By acknowledging the fundamentally historical nature of biographical research, proposing an association with microhistory, and encouraging biographers to adopt the norms of historical scholarship, the Dutch School is slowly moving biography towards history. Many biographers are now ready to join (or rejoin) the fold, and even Renders, perhaps the chief proponent of an independent Biography Studies, admits: "The biographer...is simply an historian" (Renders, 2014c, p. 226; see also Renders, 2014a, p. 37). If biographers are willing to join the discipline of history, than what is holding historians back from welcoming them?

Besides bringing clarity to the past, Historical Biography could prove effective in addressing some of the perennial concerns about the historical profession. If written with a mixed audience of academic and non-academic readers in mind, Historical Biography could combat the "irrelevance, incoherence, and balkanization" that continues to prevail in contemporary scholarship, and by so doing could increase public interest in history (McKay, 2000, p. 617). To this a neoliberal might add that, in an age when the humanities are being starved of funding and their relevance is constantly being called into question, adopting an approach or genre that has mass appeal is a no-brainer. But surely it does not take neoliberalism for historians to recognize that they need not sacrifice academic and critical standards in order to widen their works' appeal; rather, they need only abandon stilted, jargon-riddled language and esoteric theoretical approaches. The value of works with clear prose and a critical narrative approach is strikingly obvious (see Applegate, 2017, pp. 191–192).

This precise moment when biographers are calling out for "allies within the university structure" is one that should not be wasted (Rollyson, 2017, p. 184). It is high time the discipline of history recognized that biography is an important subfield and began to deliberately and actively encompass it. How should this be done? For starters, departments should build bridges with biographers by hiring historians who take a biographical approach, and should allow dissertations to take the form of Historical Biographies. They should also fund (or refund) journals, create their own centres for Historical Biography, work with academic publishers to create dedicated book series, and host conferences. Nearly three decades ago, Waite concluded that biography was "not on the periphery of history; it is in the middle of it" (Waite, 1990, p. 494). Why not make it so?

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This is based on my own analysis of the journal's contents, which excluded book reviews and based nationality on the author's institutional affiliation at their time of writing.
- ² On the contradictions of supposedly non-anthropocentric scholarship, see Fromm (1993).
- ³ Some have tried to take this middle ground: David Frank described his biography of J. B. McLachlan as "social biography," following Salvatore's approach that claimed to be both "a traditional biography...[and] a piece of social history" (Salvatore, 1982, p. xi, as cited in Frank, 1999, p. 7).
- ⁴ It is odd to invoke him, given Kershaw began his project as "a sceptical biographer" and "was not making any claims for biography to replace other kinds of historical writing," and has since made the case that biography is simply one genre of historical writing, no better or worse than others (see Kershaw, 2001, 2008).

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