

some words (for example, "bill") are far more distinct from one another than they are in the case of the word "realism," where we can imagine a set of facts about which we could simultaneously say, this is realism in the meaning *C*, *B*, or *A*<sub>1</sub>, etc., of the word. Nevertheless, it is inexcusable to confuse *C*, *B*, *A*<sub>1</sub>, etc. A term once used in American slang to denote a socially inept person was "turkey." There are probably "turkeys" in Turkey, and there are doubtless men named Harry who are blessed with great amounts of hair. But we may not jump to conclusions concerning the social aptitudes of the Turks nor the hairiness of men named Harry. This "commandment" is self-evident to the point of imbecility, yet those who speak of artistic realism continually sin against it.

Diaries as well as curiosity about unpublished documents and biographical "findings" mark an unhealthy sharpening of interest in documentary literary history, that is, history that is concerned with mores, personalities, and with the interrelationship between writers and their milieu. Most of the "documents" are relevant, not to literature or its history, but rather to the study of the author as a man (if not to the study of his brothers and aunts).

In contrast to these biographical studies, there is a concurrent development of critical literature concentrating on the specific poetic elements in verbal art (the contributions of the *Opojaz* and other branches of "Formalism"). Thus at first glance there would appear to be a profound split among literary scholars. These two currents seem to have diverged in a definitive way, and no reconciliation seems possible. To a certain extent this is true: many biographers cannot be made to comprehend an artistic work as anything but a fact of the author's biography; on the other hand, there are those for whom any kind of biographical analysis is unscientific contraband, a "back-door" approach.

Consider Puškin's poem, *Ja pomnju čudnoe mgnoven'e* [I Recall a Wondrous Instant]. Is this an artistic reference to the personal relation of Puškin to A. Kern? Or is it a free lyrical composition which uses the image of Kern as an indifferent "emblem," as structural material having no relationship to biography? Is it possible to take a neutral position on this question? Or would this be sitting down between two chairs? The question itself is very clear: do we need the poet's biography in order to understand his work, or do we not?

Before we can answer this question, however, we must remember that creative literature exists, not for literary historians, but for readers, and we must consider how the poet's biography operates in the reader's consciousness. Here we shall not regard "biography" as a self-sufficient class of historical writing (from this point of view Puškin's biography is no different from the biographies of generals and engineers); instead, we shall consider the "literary functions" of biography as the traditional concomitant of artistic work.

There have been eras during which the personality of the artist was of no interest at all to the audience. Paintings were signed with the donor's name, not the artist's; literary works bore the name of the customer or the printer. There was a great tendency

\*"Literatura i biografija," *Kniga i revoljucija*, 4 (1923), pp. 6-9. Translated by Herbert Eagle.

toward anonymity, thus leaving a wide field of investigation for present-day archaeologists and textologists. The name of the master had as much significance as the trademark of a company has today. Thus Rembrandt had no qualms about signing the paintings of his pupil, Maas.

However, during the individualization of creativity—an epoch which cultivated subjectivism in the artistic process—the name and personality of the author came to the forefront. The reader's interest reached beyond the work to its creator. This new relationship toward creativity began with the great writers of the eighteenth century. Before that time the personality of the author was hidden. Bits of gossip and anecdotes about authors did penetrate society, but these anecdotes were not combined into biographical images and considered equally along with authors and personages not connected with literature. In fact, the less gifted the writer, the more numerous the anecdotes about him. Thus anecdotes have come down to us concerning, for example, the Abbé Cotin, a minor eighteenth-century poet—but no one knows his works. At the same time, our information about Molière or about Shakespeare is quite meager, though it is true that nineteenth-century biographers later "created" the biographies of these writers and even projected their plays onto these imagined biographies. However, such biographies did not prevent others from just as successfully attributing the tragedies of Shakespeare to Bacon, Rutland, or others. From a biographical standpoint, Shakespeare remains the "iron mask" of literature.

On the other hand, eighteenth-century writers, especially Voltaire, were not only writers but also public figures. Voltaire made his artistic work a tool for propaganda, and his life, bold and provocative, served this same end. The years of exile, the years of reigning at Ferney, were used as weapons for the ideological battle and for preaching. Voltaire's works were inseparably linked with his life. His audience not only read his work but even went on pilgrimages to him. Those who admired his writings were worshippers of his personality; the adversaries of his writings were his personal enemies. Voltaire's personality linked his literary works together. When his name was mentioned, his literary works were not what first came to mind. Even today, when most of his tragedies and poems have been completely forgotten, the image of Voltaire is still alive; those forgotten works shine with reflected light in his unforgettable biography. Equally unforgettable is the biography of his contemporary, Rousseau, who left his *Confessions* and thus bequeathed to posterity the history of his life.

Voltaire and Rousseau, like many of their contemporaries, were prolific in many genres, from musical comedies to novels and philosophical treatises, from epigrams and epitaphs to theoretical articles on physics and music. Only their lives could have united these various forms of verbal creation into a system. This is why their biographies, their letters and memoirs, have become such an integral part of their literary heritage. In fact, the knowledge that their biographies were a constant background for their works compelled Voltaire and Rousseau to dramatize certain epic motifs in their own lives and, furthermore, to create for themselves an artificial legendary biography composed of intentionally selected real and imaginary events. The biographies of such authors require a Ferney or a Jasnaja Poljana: they require pilgrimages by admirers and condemnations from Sorbonnes or Holy Synods.

Following in the footsteps of these eighteenth-century writers, Byron, the poet of sharp-tempered characters, created the canonical biography for a lyrical poet. A biography of a Romantic poet was more than a biography of an author and public figure. The Romantic poet *was* his own hero. His *life* was poetry, and soon there developed a canonical set of actions to be carried out by the poet. Here, the traditions of the eighteenth century served as a model. The end of that century had produced the stereotype of the "dying poet": young, unable to overcome the adversities of life, perishing in poverty, the fame he merited coming too late. Such were the legendary biographies of two poets, Malfilâtre and Gilbert, later popularized by the Romantics (for example, Alfred de Vigny). The late eighteenth-century poets Parny and Bertin wrote their elegies with a definite orientation toward autobiography. They arranged those elegies in such a way as to convince the reader that their poems were fragments of a real romance, that their Eleonoras and Eucharidas were actual people. Delille in France and our own Xvostov appended footnotes to the feminine names they used, such as "the poet's name for his wife."

The necessity for such "real" commentary was dictated by the style of the period. Readers demanded the complete illusion of life. They made pilgrimages to the final resting places of the heroes of even the most unbelievable novels. For example, near Moscow one can still visit "Liza's Pond," in which Karamzin's sugary heroine drowned herself. They say that at Lermontov's house in Pjatigorsk artifacts which belonged to Princess Mary are exhibited.

The readers' demand for a living hero results in the perennial

question: from whom is the character drawn? This is the question which Lermontov contemptuously brushed aside in the introduction to *A Hero of Our Time*. In this connection we should consider the usual commentary to Griboedov's *Gore ot uma* [Woe from Wit]; the Moscow "old-timers" assigned all of Griboedov's heroes to actual people—as is typical of old-timers.

Once the question of copying characters from life has arisen, writers actually *do* begin to copy from life—or at least they pretend to do so. The author becomes a witness to and a living participant in his novels, a living hero. A double transformation takes place: heroes are taken for living personages, and poets become living heroes—their biographies become poems.

In the Puškin era, when the genre of "friendly epistles" flourished, poets paraded before their audience as characters. Now Puškin writes to Baratynskij from Bessarabia, now Jazykov writes to Puškin. And then all three of them become the themes of lyrical poems.

The lyricism of Puškin's long poems is clearly the result of an orientation toward autobiography. The reader had to feel that he was reading, not the words of an abstract author, but those of a living person whose biographical data were at his disposal. Thus the author had to make literary use of his own biography. So Puškin used his southern exile as a poetic banishment. Motifs of exile, of wanderings, run throughout his poetry in many variations. We must assume that Puškin poetically fostered certain facts of his life. For example, he jealously expunged references to *deva junaja* [the young maid] from poems already completed and well-known in print, and from those widely circulated in manuscript. At the same time, he wrote to his friends in an ambiguous and enigmatic tone about unrequited love. In conversation, he became prone to mysteriously incoherent outpourings. And behold, the poetic legend of a "concealed love" was created with its ostentatious devices used for concealing love, when it would have been much simpler to keep silent. However, Puškin was concerned about his "biography," and the image of a young exile with a hidden and unrequited love, set against the background of Crimean nature, fascinated him. He needed this image as a frame for his southern poems. Nonetheless, present-day biographers have dealt mercilessly with this stylish legend. They have been determined to learn at any cost the identity of the woman whom Puškin so hopelessly loved (or pretended to love). Thus they have destroyed the very core of the legend—the unknown. In place of

"young maids," they have proposed various respectable society women.

The interrelationships of life and literature became confused during the Romantic era. Romanticism and its mores constitute a problem to which careful investigations have been devoted. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether literature recreates phenomena from life or whether the opposite is in fact the case: that the phenomena of life are the result of the penetration of literary clichés into reality. Such motifs as the duel, the Caucasus, etc., were invariant components both of literature and of the poet's biography.

The poets used their lives to realize a literary purpose, and these literary biographies were necessary for the readers. The readers cried: "Author! author!"—but they were actually calling for the slender youth in a cloak, with a lyre in his hands and an enigmatic expression on his face. This demand for a potentially existing author, whether real or not, gave rise to a special kind of anonymous literature: literature with an invented author, whose biography was appended to the work. We find a literary precedent for this genre in Voltaire's mystifications. He published stories under the name of Guillaume Vadé and appended a letter written by Catherine Vadé (the imaginary first cousin of the imagined author) describing the last days of her cousin Guillaume.

In this connection, we should also consider the stories of Belkin and Rudyj Pan'ko. At the basis of these mystifications lies the very same demand of the public: "Give us a living author!" If the author wanted to hide, then he had to send forth an invented narrator. Biography became an element of literature.

The biographies of real authors, for example of Puškin and Lermontov, were cultivated as oral legends. How many interesting anecdotes the old-timers "knew" about Puškin! Read the reminiscences of the Kišenev inhabitants about the poet. You will find tales that even Puškin wouldn't have dreamt of. In these tales, a tragic love and an exotic lover (a gypsy or a Greek) are absolutely necessary. As fiction, however, all this is far more superior to the recently published anecdote in the notes of Naščokin-Bartenevskij concerning Puškin and the Countess Finkel'mon.

Thus, legends about poets were created, and it was extremely important for the literary historian to occupy himself with the restoration of these legends, i.e., with the removal of later layers and the reduction of the legend to its pure "canonical" form. These biographical legends are the literary conception of the

poet's life, and this conception was necessary as a perceptible background for the poet's literary works. The legends are a premise which the author himself took into account during the creative process.

The biographical commentary to a literary work often consists of the curriculum vitae, the genealogy, of the characters mentioned in the work. However, in referring to a given character, the author did not assume that the reader knew the curriculum vitae of that character. However, he did assume that the reader knew the character's anecdotal representation, consisting of actual and invented material, created in the reader's milieu. When Puškin was writing *Mozart and Salieri*, what was important was not the actual historical relationship between these two composers (and here their biographies, based on documents and investigations, would not help anyway), but the fact that there existed a legend about the poisoning of Mozart by Salieri, and that rumors were current that Beaumarchais had poisoned his wives. The question of whether these rumors and legends had any foundation in fact was irrelevant to their function.

In exactly the same way, the poet considers as a premise to his creations not his actual curriculum vitae, but his ideal biographical legend. Therefore, only this biographical legend should be important to the literary historian in his attempt to reconstruct the psychological milieu surrounding a literary work. Furthermore, the biographical legend is necessary only to the extent that the literary work includes references to "biographical" facts (real or legendary) of the author's life.

However, the poet did not always have a biography. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, the poet-hero was replaced by the professional poet, the businessman-journalist. The writer wrote down his manuscript and gave it to a publisher; he did not allow any glimpses of his personal life. The human face of the author peered out only in pasquinades, in satirical pamphlets, or in monetary squabbles which burst out noisily in public whenever contributors were not satisfied with their royalties. Thus the phenomenon of writers without biographies appeared. All attempts to invent biographies for these writers and to project their work onto these biographies have consistently ended in farce. Nekrasov, for example, appears on the literary scene without a biography, as do Ostrovskij and Fet. Their works are self-contained units. There are no biographical features shedding light on the meaning of their works. Nevertheless, there are scholars

who want to imagine literary biographies even for these authors.

It is, of course, obvious that these authors do have *actual* biographies, and that their literary work enters into these biographies as a fact of their lives. Such actual biographies of private individuals may be interesting for cultural history, but not for the history of literature. (I say nothing of those literary historians who classify literary phenomena on the basis of the circumstances of the writer's birth.) No poetic image of the author—except perhaps as a deliberately invented narrator who is introduced into the story itself (like Puškin's Belkin)—can be found in this period. Works did not depend on the presence of a biographical background.

This "cold" nineteenth-century writer, however, did not represent an exclusive type which was to replace "biographically oriented" literature forever. At the very end of the century interest in the author began to arise once again, and this interest has continued to grow to the present day. First, there appeared a timid interest in "good people." We suffered through a period when the writer was necessarily considered "a good person"; we suffered through images of wretched victims, images of oppressed consumptive poets. We suffered through them to the point of nausea.

In the twentieth century there appeared a special type of writer with a demonstrative biography, one which shouted out: "Look at how bad and how impudent I am! Look! And don't turn your head away, because all of you are just as bad, only you are faint-hearted and hide yourselves. But I am bold; I strip myself stark naked and walk around in public without feeling ashamed." This was the reaction to the "sweetness" of the "good man."

Fifteen years ago someone came out with a "calendar of writers," in which the autobiographies of the men of letters fashionable at that time were collected. These writers all vied with one another in crying out that they had no formal education because they had been expelled from high school and from trade school, that they had only torn trousers and a few buttons—and all this because they absolutely didn't care about anything.

However, alongside this petty naughtiness in literature, there emerged a new intimate style. Many writers, of course, still persisted in concealing their private lives from the public. Sologub, for one, systematically refused to provide any information whatsoever about himself. But other and rather different trends were

also present in literature. Vasilij Rozanov created a distinctive intimate style. The pages of his books were like "falling leaves," and he strolled through them uncombed, whole, completely himself. He produced a special literature of intimate conversations and confidential confessions. We know, by his own admission, that he was a mystifier. It is the business of cultural historians to judge to what extent the face he carefully drew in his fragments and aphorisms was his own. As a literary legend, Rozanov's image has been drawn, by him, definitively and with complete consistency. This image shows little resemblance either to the "heroic poets" of the beginning of the nineteenth century or to the "good persons" with progressive convictions of the end of the century. However, it is impossible to deny that this image was viable and artistically functional during the years of Rozanov's literary work. Furthermore, the autobiographical devices of Rozanov's literary manner have survived him and are still present today in novelistic or fragmentary memoirs.

Parallel to this prosaic element in the Symbolist movement, there also developed a biographical lyricism. Blok was certainly a poet with a lyrical biography. The numerous memoirs and biographical works on Blok which appeared within a year of his death testify to the fact that his biography was a living and necessary commentary to his works. His poems are lyrical episodes about himself, and his readers always informed themselves (perhaps at third-hand) about the principal events of his life. It would be inaccurate to say that Blok put his life on display. Nonetheless, his poems did arouse an insurmountable desire to know about the author, and they made his readers avidly follow the various twists and turns of his life. Blok's legend is an inescapable concomitant to his poetry. The elements of intimate confession and biographical allusion in his poetry must be taken into account.

Symbolism was superseded by Futurism, which intensified to a hyperbolic clarity those features which had previously appeared only in hidden, mystically masked forms of Symbolism. Intimate confessions and allusions were transformed into demonstrative declarations delivered in a monumental style. Whereas Blok's biography appeared only as a legendary concomitant to his poetry, the Futurist legendary biographies were boldly inserted into the works themselves.

Futurism took the Romantic orientation toward autobiography to its ultimate conclusions. The author really became the hero of

his works. We need mention here only the construction of Majakovskij's books: they are an open diary in which intimate feelings are recorded. This type of construction, in fact, intersects the path of the future biographer, who will have to try to construct a different, extraliterary, biography. Today the writer shows his readers his own life and writes his own biography, tightly binding it to the literary cycles of his work. If, for example, Gor'kij drives away importunate idlers, then he does this knowingly, as a demonstration: he knows that this very fact will be taken into account in his biography. Just consider how many of today's poets reminisce about themselves and their friends, how many of them produce memoir literature—memoirs transformed into artistic structures.

Obviously, the question of the role of biography in literary history cannot be solved uniformly for all literatures. There are writers with biographies and writers without biographies. To attempt to compose biographies for the latter is to write satires or denunciations on the alive or the dead as well. On the other hand, for a writer with a biography, the facts of the author's life must be taken into consideration. Indeed, in the works themselves the juxtaposition of the texts and the author's biography plays a structural role. The literary work plays on the potential reality of the author's subjective outpourings and confessions. Thus the biography that is useful to the literary historian is not the author's curriculum vitae or the investigator's account of his life. What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a *literary fact*.

As far as "documentary biographies" are concerned, these belong to the domain of cultural history, on a par with the biographies of generals and inventors. With regard to literature and its history, these biographies may be considered only as external (even if necessary) reference material of an auxiliary nature.