

life at the time, but again it is all about his public life as an ‘engaged intellectual’. Grenfell shows how Algeria spanned the whole of Bourdieu’s career and formed the basis of the development of his theory of praxis. Although Bourdieu’s impact on the sociology of education has been widely documented and discussed and indeed Grenfell’s contribution in this area has been pivotal, what this chapter particularly highlights is Bourdieu’s life-long fascination for the role of education not only in how individuals make sense of the world but perhaps more importantly in how through education they can be empowered to intervene in its making/changing. The last chapter of Part One clearly presents how Bourdieu’s sociological analyses of Media and Culture are both deeply embedded in the important role that art and culture have held historically in French society and highly critical of the social conditions of cultural production and consumption. The section on Bourdieu’s analysis of cultural resistance once again creates a link to the main aim of the book, highlighting Bourdieu’s political persona. Finally, the third part of the book looks into how economics and philosophical thought have shaped the development of Bourdieu’s ideas and analyses, concluding with a chapter on specific acts of resistance. This last part mainly addresses Bourdieu’s theoretical and political stance in the last decades of the twentieth century, highlighting his concrete formulation of a sociological philosophy. Globalization, the New Poor, neoliberalism and the role of the intellectuals are all themes that are discussed in this section in relation to how they were integrated in Bourdieu’s project. Of particular importance is the last chapter of this section and indeed of the book, where Grenfell focuses particularly on Bourdieu’s theory of knowledge and the philosophical questions it opens up in examining the relation between subjects, their social realities and the possibility of gaining scientific knowledge about the world.

Overall the book succeeds in its aim, namely in being a homage to Bourdieu’s work and although it cannot be argued that it offers something distinctive in Bourdieu’s scholarship, it does form an excellent panorama of Bourdieu’s work, ideas and concepts, which makes it a recommended reading for anybody interested in being introduced to Bourdieu’s work.

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BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS FOUND WANTING AND FOUND GOOD

Reading biography. Carl Rollyson, 2004. New York, London, Shanghai: iUniverse; ISBN: 0595337473 paper, 105 pp., US\$12.95.

Essays in biography. Carl Rollyson, 2005. New York, London, Shanghai: iUniverse; ISBN: 0595341810 paper, 68 pp., US\$10.95.

The first of these two short volumes is composed of selections from Carl Rollyson's weekly column 'On Biography', which he has written for *The New York Sun* newspaper since 2003. Frequently describing himself as a professional biographer, academic and author of nine 'full' biographies, Rollyson sets out to remedy the sub-standard nature of biography reviewing, which he laments for its lack of knowledge about the 'history or the art of biography' (p. vii). He claims that most biography reviewers base their commentaries on their personal responses to the biographical subject, heedless of the aesthetics conventions and practical techniques of biographical writing, a fault which he hopes in this short volume to put right.

Whether or not we agree with this assessment of the current state of biography criticism (no evidence is offered in support), the author's claim to provide something akin to a treatise on the art of biography amounts to rather a tall order, on which it consummately fails to deliver. The pieces culled from Rollyson's weekly column are very short and mostly dominated by a succession of clichés: from 'biography is a transgressive genre' (p. 15), 'Biography reveals what autobiography conceals' (p. 24) and 'Biography is not history' (p. 37) to the excruciating 'biography, too, can be a dance to the music of time' (p. 6). Rollyson relies too much on rehashing the over-rehearsed battle between biography and history on the one hand, and biography and autobiography on the other, without adding anything particularly new or edifying to these debates. This over-reliance on cliché is particularly evident in Rollyson's slight treatment of 'Biography and Fiction', a chapter which, given the promises to reveal the aesthetic merit of biography rivalling both history and the novel, should have been the centrepiece of this book. Neither is he above reacting personally to the biographical subject (NB Martha Gellhorn).

This is not to say that there are not some insightful and elucidating moments in this book. The selections on the biographies of Stalin and Richard Yates stand out among their neighbours, showcasing biography at its most compelling, through its fresh revelation of telling anecdotes and the exposure of heretofore under-recognized talent. In addition, the author rightly points out some of the more admirable aspects of certain overlooked sub-genres, such as children's biography and pictorial biography. Similarly, Rollyson shines in some of his comparative commentary on biographers, demonstrating how biography is a consummately cumulative and competitive enterprise, benefiting from a multiplicity of voices and texts. In these sections, I gained a new perspective on a genre I love, and was inspired to read about previously unknown subjects. But these were isolated moments.

Probably the most frustrating thing about this book is the author's near total disregard for bibliographic conventions. In light of his frequent reminders of his status as a professional biographer and academic, the absence not just of a bibliography but of any information regarding the year of publication or publishers of the biographies he reviews, nor of the dates of his own reviews, is perplexing and sloppy. One would think that a professional biographer would appreciate that the devil is in the attention to this kind of detail, that much of the author's credibility in such a 'contentious' genre relies on the author's observance of these basic practices. Likewise, the editorial standards leave much to be desired; given that this is such a short book, one would have thought that we could have been spared not just the twice but thrice repetition of material that blights the otherwise satisfactory 'Comparing Biographers'.

In summary, I would hesitantly recommend this book, but with strong reservations and only to those who are avid readers on the subject of biography.

Essays in biography (2005) fares considerably better, not least because of the comparative modesty of the author's stated objective. Though the insistence on the 'play on words' represented by the title is rather forced, nonetheless the aim 'to essay, to make an attempt, a test, or a trial' (p. vii) on the nature of biographical writing as an intrinsically unfinished enterprise is both interesting and commendable.

And so these essays generally prove to be. The standards of Rollyson's writing, analysis and critique are considerably improved. The essay on W.A. Swanberg, biographer of Hearst, Pulitzer and Dreiser among other notable American writers is particularly worthy as a polemical offering on biographical writing; though Rollyson's apologetic excusing biographers of literary figures from attending to their subject's writings is less than convincing, his deflection onto the development of the biographer's voice raises interesting and challenging questions about the genre. Significantly, the quality of analysis benefits considerably by the inclusion of a critical bibliography. Highly recommended.

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METHODOLOGICAL RIGOUR IN THE IMAGINATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF PAST LIVES

Writing biography: historians and their craft. Lloyd E. Ambrosius, editor, 2004. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; ISBN 0803210663 cloth, 166 pp., £34.50.