

# BIOGRAPHY OR PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY?

*'But facts are chieils that winna ding,  
An' downa be disputed.'*

Robert Burns - A Dream, 1786.

(Translated: Facts are fellows that won't be smashed or overcome, and cannot be disputed.)

## Introduction

Biography is popular – nothing new in that. In 1832 Carlyle wrote in his essay on Biography of the 'unspeakable delight' that we all take in biography. Look at the shelves in your local bookshop or public library, and you will see the proof. As you survey the footballers and other sports stars, the Royals, and the famous who are famous for being famous, you may not like what you see, but they are more read than much modern fiction, which is increasingly less concerned with story telling, and often very gloomy. Biographies are usually more optimistic and provide a coherent story. Carlyle said of Fictitious Narratives - novels – 'What are all these but so many mimic biographies?' ; and went on to claim of all other types of writing that they were 'foam; because there is no *Reality* in them.'

But it is not only popular biography that flourishes. The last half century has been claimed as a Golden Age for biography in English, especially literary biography, and in the last thirty years this has been reflected in the many academic books and conferences on the subject.

This web site's common theme is Biography; often a specialist kind of biography, which attempts to apply the writer's experience in academic and clinical psychiatry to life writing. And biography pervades not only the site but its subjects. Few authors have been subjected to as many biographical assaults as Virginia Woolf, and she was both the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, who began the Dictionary of National Biography, and a biographer herself, writing *Orlando*, a highly influential fictional biography; another on a dog, *Flush*; and a third on her friend Roger Fry, together with essays on biography and memoirs of her own life. Carlyle too was a biographer, and wrote essays on Scott and Burns, *Past and Present*, a *Life of Sterling*, and the huge *Frederick the Great*, which took him thirteen weary years to complete. He had strong views on the writing of biography, and inspired Froude's *Life*, one of the most influential and controversial of all biographies. In recent years Medical History has burgeoned as a specialty within medicine, with an expansion of academic departments and journals devoted to it. The subject has also produced much medical biography, whether it be the lives of medical men from the past, such as my web pages on Sir James Crichton-Browne and Dr John Carlyle, or the role of illness in the life and work of famous people in history - artists, musicians, politicians and writers. My pages on Virginia Woolf's bipolar attacks can readily be accommodated under the umbrella of medical biography and history, but other pages in my writings about Woolf and the Carlyles comment on personality and character rather than illness. And this is the area that is often described as psychobiography or pathography.

When I began this web site over ten years ago, by publishing its Virginia Woolf pages, I used the term 'psychobiography' to describe them, in the belief that the term aptly described a psychiatrist writing about the psychiatric illness and personality of a famous writer. Now, writing in 2008, I am not so sure. In the interim, some psychologists, who unlike psychiatrists have no medical qualifications and often no direct experience of psychiatric disorders, have claimed 'psychobiography' as their own private preserve, maintaining that their expertise in psychological theories uniquely fits them for the task. These claims are not wholeheartedly supported by many of their colleagues, but are worth examining, especially as they seem to exclude medical and psychiatric factors from their remit. Since definitions of psychobiography and pathography differ greatly, they will bear close scrutiny. A review of the history of biography will show an emphasis on character since its very beginnings. It will be argued that the best biographies, especially since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, can be considered as 'psychobiography,' and that the term psychobiography is unnecessary and best avoided.

## Definitions

An American psychologist, and the author of a handbook on the subject (Schultz, 2005) defines **psychobiography** as:

'The name given to life stories making substantial use of psychological theory and/or research to shed light on the interior lives of biographical subjects, and the connection between life and work.'

Most dictionaries that define the term, and many do not, give similar definitions. Wikipedia, for example, gives: 'Its aim is to understand historically significant individuals through the application of psychological theory and research.' Such definitions give priority to psychological theory and have often applied it to existing biographies without carrying out any primary research to establish the biographical facts at first hand.

**Pathography** is sometimes used as a synonym for psychobiography, but more often carries associations with disease. One dictionary defines pathography as: 'the retrospective study, often by a physician, of possible influence and effects of disease on the life and work of an historical personage or group.' But the word has also been used to describe patient's accounts of their illnesses, and even to describe the prose and poetry of patients whose language is disturbed and distorted by schizophrenia, dementia, and other psychiatric and neurological conditions. It has also been used for writings *about* the mentally or physically ill whether factual or fictive. And more recently it has been applied to sensational biography, or 'negative' biography, seemingly derived from the American novelist Joyce Carol Oates, who wrote of: 'pathography's technique of emphasizing the sensational underside of its subject's life.'

These multiple meanings make pathography such a confusing term that it is best avoided or defined when introduced by a writer. Psychobiography is similarly confusing, and present definitions may or may not include the use of clinical psychiatric knowledge. A brief history of biography may illustrate the tasks of the biographer and show whether they differ at all from those of the psychobiographer.

## History of Biography

*'There are three rules for writing biography, but fortunately no one knows what they are.'* – Somerset Maugham

*'Most biographies are just novels with indexes.'* John Updike, NY Review of Books, 4/2 99

*'History is the essence of innumerable Biographies.'* Thomas Carlyle

*'The history of the world is but the biography of great men.'* Thomas Carlyle – Heroes and Hero-Worship

### Plutarch

The word biography has two Greek roots meaning life and writing, and in recent years some have preferred to talk of Life Writing. 'Biography' -the word - was not used widely in English until the 17th century, but this did not stop the Greeks and Romans writing it as well as defining it. Plutarch, writing the lives of famous Romans and Greeks in the first century AD, was at pains to separate history and biography, and believed that history examined man's deeds, and biography should reveal who humans are. In his introduction to his life of Alexander the Great he expands on this view:

*'...I am writing biography, not history, and the truth is that the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man's character than the mere feat of winning battles in which thousands fall....'* (Plutarch, Lives)

He believed that the virtues of his great men should serve him 'as a looking glass in which I may see how to adjust and adorn my own life.' In short, biography should provide moral lessons for its readers.

This last trend was to lead to a dark age for biography in the Middle Ages when it became hagiography and provided varnished rather than unvarnished portraits of the saints. In Britain it did not completely recover, despite Aubrey's Brief Lives and other good Elizabethan works, until the advent of these two great and coupled figures, James Boswell and Samuel Johnson.

### Johnson and Boswell

Johnson and Boswell advanced biography in numerous ways; Johnson by his collective biographies of English poets (1779-1781) and his Life of Richard Savage (1744); and Boswell by his life of his friend, even today recognized as the first modern, and the most famous biography in English.

Boswell can be thought of as the founder of the huge and comprehensive biography based on extensive research, using primary materials ( the subject's letters and other writings together with records of his conversation, and documented evidence of every kind about his life) and including most of them in the published work. This was in complete contrast to Johnson's method, also based on extensive background research but then filtering it, as it were, and presenting it in a much more concise and interpreted form.

Johnson also wrote two essays on biography, published in the Rambler in 1750 and 1759. He believed like Plutarch that the biographer should pay less attention to 'those performances and incidents that produce vulgar greatness,' and more to 'domestic privacies' and 'invisible circumstances.' In a famous phrase he asserted that 'there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful.' This was almost the first time that writing the lives of those who were not rich or famous had been suggested as a useful enterprise..

Johnson believed that the biographer's task was to gather accurate information to distinguish important details exemplifying character. Both Boswell and Johnson laid great emphasis on the use of primary materials, and Boswell spent many years collecting material from and about his friend during his life, leading to a biography that is unsurpassed for records of conversation and anecdotes about Johnson and his circle.

## 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Boswell's great work was first published in 1791, and was the climax of a century in which professional biography dawned, became common, and influenced the form of fiction, with many novels appearing in first person form and including letters and diary entries. The reading public for biography also flourished. As the nineteenth century proceeded, Victorian reticence diminished some of the advances in frankness that Johnson and Boswell had pioneered. Great biographies were written, including Lockhart's of Walter Scott, Southey's of Admiral Nelson, Gaskell's of Charlotte Bronte, and Carlyle's of Frederick the Great, but the general trend was to speak no ill of the dead and to conceal their faults and any information that might dismay the prudish. As at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Boswell's Johnson, so at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>, the publication in 1882 and 1884 of the four volumes of Froude's Life of Carlyle created a sensation. It was regarded by many as scandalous and the controversy it aroused still smoulders on today.

An even bigger upheaval in biography followed with the rise of the self-styled 'new biography' early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It had close associations with Bloomsbury and Woolf, and especially with Lytton Strachey, exemplified in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918), a series of short biographical studies, and *Queen Victoria* (1921). Strachey, whose brother was a psychoanalyst and translator of Freud into English, was one of the first biographers to use Freudian ideas to attempt to identify hidden drives behind individual acts. Strachey did little primary research and was highly selective in his use of material from previous writers to support his ideas. Storr (1995) reminds us that Freud wrote to Lytton Strachey after reading *Elizabeth and Essex*, and was polite but cautious, expressing some reservations about applying psychoanalysis to historical figures.

Strachey's friend Virginia Woolf thought that nineteenth century biography had declined in quality, and had failed to live up to Boswell's ability to disclose character. In her 1927 essay, *The New Biography*, she claimed that 'in the old days biographers told tales of battle and victory. We, by contrast, can no longer maintain that life consists in actions only or in works. It consists in personality.' In the same essay, she highlighted the main problem for biographers:

'The biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity, he loses both worlds.'

In other words, the dilemma facing the biographer in the twentieth century was to be the conflict between sticking to the facts of research and the claims of art and imagination. She returned to the subject much later in her life in a second essay – *The Art of Biography* (*Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1939). By this time she was less optimistic about biography, and spoke of the high death

rate of biographies: 'Of the many written how few survive?' Having tried both forms she had decided that, while biographers are tied to facts, the novelist is free, so that it is harder to succeed in biography than in fiction.

### **Biography Today**

Since then biography has become very popular, and many critics believe that in the English speaking world we live in a golden age of biography. Others feel that the massive biography, often the work of a U.S. academic, is a collection of minutiae without meaning. Fish (NewYorkTimes 9/99) claimed that the old master narrative models have lost their meaning for present day readers. They had two models in the past: the 'providential,' in which humans were tainted by original sin and doomed to repeat the failings of Adam and Eve, expelled from Eden with providence their guide; and a second, 'wheel of fortune model' in which cycles of luck and misfortune determined the story's course and outcome. Modern biographers collect details, then 'invent or fabricate a meaning' based on their 'favourite hobby-horse' to hold the narrative together, but don't succeed, and produce only 'a collection of contingencies in a universe of accident and chance.'

### **Freud and the Psychologists**

*'What seems true is not always the truth.'* – Freud, letter 18.12 1923, CW Vol. 19, p187

It is clear from the very beginnings of the history of biography that the illumination of the character, personality, and psychology of the individual has always been regarded as the main task and challenge of the biographer, Do professional psychologists and their theories of personality add anything to what all good biographers have done and do now?

Most of the biographies written by psychologists have been based on the theories of psychoanalysis or later derivative theories, stemming from the biographical theories and essays of Freud himself. And yet, more than a century after its beginnings, there is no convincing evidence that psychoanalysis is an effective form of treatment for any psychiatric disorder. The theory itself is not regarded now as a scientific theory. It does not yield testable predictions or hypotheses, and provides no empirical evidence for its claims. It is a pseudoscience, a belief system akin to a religion, and as a result it has fallen out of favour and repute in medicine and psychiatry, while retaining some supporters in literary circles.

But Freud's influence in many areas of life over the last century is undeniable. What Nabokov dismissed as 'the application of Greek myths to the genitals' has infiltrated the public mind, and played a part during these years in changing attitudes to sexual behaviour and the importance of childhood experiences in determining adult conduct. Many Freudian ideas have become everyday currency as helpful shorthand descriptions of personality, problems and attitudes: conflict, repression, projection, ambivalence compulsion, narcissism, death wish, erogenous zones, fixations, guilt feelings, sublimation and wish fulfillment. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century much of the data needed to support speculations about an individuals inner life and his behaviour, especially about sex, was simply not available, or was suppressed. Byron's publisher, Murray, burned Byron's memoirs as unsuitable for public

consumption, and the prudish Victorians self-censored biography. Hermione Lee, in *Body Parts*, spells out uncompromisingly one of the main shifts that took place in 20th century biography:

'...the life of the body plays much more of a part in contemporary biographical narratives. Masturbation, dental work, body odour, menstruation, gonorrhoea, addictions and sexual preferences are all permissible subjects; the shock and horror that greeted Froude's revelations about Carlyle's marital behaviour and impotence, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would now be replaced by sympathy and clinical interest'.

It is far from clear that Carlyle was impotent, and it may be doubted whether his marital behaviour to Jane now commands universal sympathy, but no one would question her list of permissible subjects. Much of this is due to Freud.

When Freud died in 1939 the poet Auden already recognised this:

*'if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd,  
to us he is no more a person  
now but a whole climate of opinion.'*

Freud's 'Leonardo' is often cited as the first instance of a psychoanalytic biography. It is an unfortunate choice. He made use of a dream recorded by Leonardo in his journals, of a bird coming to his cradle and inserting its tail into his mouth. Freud read a faulty translation of his source, which identified the bird as vulture instead of a kite, and based much of his interpretation on the mythology of vultures. This cavalier lack of research and overuse of theory has continued in psychoanalytic biography since. Freud made other errors. He was wrong about Dostoevsky's epilepsy and his father. He was wrong about Judge Schreber, basing his essay on Schreber's memoirs and never having met him. Freud also worked with an American diplomat, Bullitt, on a study of Woodrow Wilson, using psychoanalysis for character assassination. Little wonder that in the years of their popularity in the United States after the second world war, psychoanalysts were prone to making grandiose claims.

In 1964 a group of them, opposed to Barry Goldwater standing as a candidate for the Presidency and his apparent support for nuclear war, issued a statement saying that he was mentally unstable and unfit for office. After the furor that followed, the American Psychiatric Association saw fit to add to its ethical principles, by saying that its members should not offer a diagnosis or professional opinion about someone they have not examined personally. This did not stop other attacks on politicians in the US. '*Nixon, a Psychobiography*' (Volkan et al, 1999) interpreted the ex-president's life and latter days in office with some theories from the wilder shores of analysis. They attributed Nixon's physical clumsiness to anxieties about masturbation or to murderous fantasies directed to the Oedipal father. He failed to destroy the Watergate tapes because they were 'anal gems that could not be given away.' Nixon was alive but not consulted by the authors. It was hardly surprising that he said: 'I happen to think that most of the so-called new science of psychobiography is pure baloney.' Nixon was able to respond; the defenceless dead, more often subjected to these theories, are not.

Nearly all examples of psychobiography written by psychologists and lay writers make some use of psychoanalytic theory, and other theories have followed, including object relations theory, existentialism, phenomenology, and more recently script theory and narrative models.

In a recent collection of essays on biography (Ambrosius, L. E. *Writing Biography*, U Nebraska, 2004) Shirley A. Leckie described psychobiography as:

'...a category that many historians and biographers alike regard with suspicion, and with good reason. Neither historians nor biographers are usually trained professionals in the behavioural sciences. Moreover, many of the psychological or psychoanalytic theories that psychobiographers have often invoked have been discredited or at the very least subjected to scathing criticism.'

Despite this, a few American universities now have departments of psychobiography, offering undergraduate courses, and there are several books on the subject, including a textbook. Many academic psychologists accept the subject grudgingly, or not at all.

### **Anthony Storr – a Jungian view**

Anthony Storr was both a Jungian analyst and a practicing psychiatrist, and published much original work on creative individuals. In an essay on *Psychiatry and Literary Biography* (Batchelor, 1995), he put forward three premises:

'The first is that detailed psychoanalytic interpretations of the character and behaviour of deceased persons in terms of what may have happened to them in early childhood are intrinsically unreliable.'

'The second premise is that, in contrast, ideas and concepts originally derived from psychoanalysis have become so incorporated into intellectual discourse that biographers automatically employ them without often realizing from whence they came.'

His third premise states that although psychoanalytic interpretations have not been so helpful in biography as early analysts hoped, 'clinical psychiatry..... has provided biographical insights into literary figures which are invaluable and unappreciated.'

These points can be exemplified by the enormous amount written on Virginia Woolf's health, and discussed on this site, which provides an excellent example of psychiatry versus psychoanalysis in action. The distinction is a sharp one: Freud and many of his successors had little or no clinical experience of the seriously mentally ill – but this did not stop them having views on bipolar illness and schizophrenia and even on the dementias. In psychosomatic medicine many patients were subjected to years of analysis for peptic ulcer, now cured with an antibiotic in a few weeks. We seldom read apologies for such errors.

Storr quoted many of the errors of Freudian psychoanalysts. Edel, for example, assumed that Henry James' homosexuality was caused by his mother's behaviour. Richard Ellmann has refuted this, and found no real evidence to support it. It was Ellmann who noted that nearly all psychobiographers trace their subjects' problems to the Oedipus complex, so that, to judge from their writings, Woodrow Wilson, Martin Luther and Gustave Flaubert might all be confused with one another! Storr believed, perhaps too optimistically, that such oversimplification has vanished in the last fifty years as the influence of psychoanalysis has declined, in contrast to the growth of studies of psychiatric disorders in the famous, especially those with bipolar disorder.

## Biography as Autobiography

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*'When a man is attempting to describe another's character, he may be right or he may be wrong – but in one thing he will always succeed, in describing himself.'* Coleridge

Facts are the basis of biographical research but selection must occur; otherwise there would be little difference between biographies of the same person, of which there are many— Hitler is said to have had over fifty biographers to date. Bias is first introduced when the writer chooses a subject. Even if commissioned to write the book, the author has been selected by another, often a relative of the subject, and has had the opportunity to accept or decline. Most biographers choose subjects because of their personal interest.

He or she may be attracted to or repelled by the subject, planning either a panegyric or a hatchet job.

The themes resonate within the author, who is then inclined to select from the facts available to further his own story. Selection is the point at which biographical bias is introduced, unless a collection of primary sources is virtually unedited. The more that is included – diaries, accounts of others, interviews, letters – the less bias will be apparent; hence the vogue for massive tomes. But selection is needed

A related question is that of the author's personal acquaintance or even family relationship with the subject. Throughout the history of biography, writers have put forward their personal knowledge of their subject as an important qualification for writing their life. Others have argued just the opposite and pointed to the great risk of personal bias interfering with the task. This can be illustrated in the lives of those who have had multiple biographers. Virginia Woolf was well served by an honest biography by her nephew, Quentin Bell, but others have been critical of him. And Froude was very friendly with the older Carlyle, and was hounded for his great biography, both for inaccuracies and for revealing aspects of Carlyle's life that others wished had remained hidden, when Froude was only trying to follow Carlyle's express wishes.

Perhaps because of this we should demand some biographical information about the biographer. Any relationship with the subject and the subject's family should of course be revealed. Is the writer a psychologist or psychiatrist? If so, what schools of psychology or special interests does he or she champion? Such information may serve as a token of competence, or as a warning of bias. Feminist biographers, for example, can be biased but their beliefs are rarely hidden in their writings.

Biography is popular because we are all curious about our fellow men and women. As readers we select the biographies we buy or borrow in the same way, and introduce bias ourselves, by avoiding some that might challenge our views.

## My Web Site

Consider all this in terms of my life and my website. I write with qualifications in medicine and psychiatry, and in retirement after a lifetime of clinical

experience in the latter. Hence my interest in other psychiatrists and my pages on Sir James Crichton-Browne and Dr John Carlyle.

My early years of training in psychiatry were spent at Crichton Royal, Dumfries, where Crichton-Browne's father was the first superintendent. My mother was born and raised in Dumfriesshire, on a farm a few miles from the farms associated with Thomas Carlyle and his family, and I spent many childhood holidays in Dumfriesshire and was evacuated there in 1939 at the start of the war. Carlyle, the poor scholar at Edinburgh University, was often held up to me as a role model in childhood, and I later graduated from Edinburgh, the same university as Carlyle, and from the same faculty as his doctor brother. It is obvious that these early influences played a part in my choice of subjects over fifty years later.

Virginia Woolf is a less obvious choice. I have always been attracted to diaries, and hers are fine detailed accounts of most of her life. The facts of the Woolfs' lives were well documented by themselves and by the voluble rest of Bloomsbury – another attraction. And her bipolar attacks are included in these excellent descriptions, and of great interest to a psychiatrist. What finally brought me to writing about her health was indignation about the many misrepresentations of her illnesses, and especially the adverse criticism of her husband which seemed to me quite unjustified, something confirmed since in Victoria Glendinning's *Leonard Woolf* (2006).

Similar considerations led me to the Carlyle family: good sources in the immense Carlyle letter project, now online, a husband and wife who were not mentally ill but very hypochondriacal, and whose marriage had long been a subject of irritable disputation. Since then I have had much help and stimulation from joining the Carlyle Society, and getting to know members of the Carlyle Letters project.

I have always tried to tread only in areas where I felt my knowledge and experience gave me a right to do so, and have never attempted any literary criticism of Carlyle or Woolf. My most recent projects, on *The Carlyles*, *Dr Gully and the Water Cure*, and on the *Carlyles and Opium*, again use my medical background to explore the Carlyles' contact with aspects of medicine in Victorian times.

## Conclusions

This review of the subject may be summarised in a list of recommendations to both writers and their readers.

- The terms pathography and psychobiography should not be used, and biographies so titled should be treated with some suspicion, and the author's qualifications established.
- The biographer should give his reader information about both himself and his sources, and the reader should be alert to possible biases the biographer may have as a result of his background.
- The biographer should avoid reductive psychoanalytic theories.
- The 'Buried Treasure' theory – such as the sledge in *Citizen Kane* – that adult problems can be attributed to isolated childhood events is always an oversimplification.
- As is the invocation of an Oedipal Complex

- Mental mechanisms have entered general use and are widely understood and hence useful; but it should be remembered that most of them lack any objective scientific appraisal.
- Facts and comments should be separated, and the selection of some facts and the rejection of others visible and justified. For the reader this may require reading several biographies of one person.

## A Reading List

Clifford, James C. *Biography as an Art – Selected Criticism 1560-1960*. London OUP 1962.

This is an excellent source book, containing essential writings by Johnson, Boswell, Coleridge, Carlyle, Strachey and Woolf, together with many others., and a fine list of twentieth century publications up to 1960.

Salwa, Dale (Ed.) *The Literary Biography – Problems and Solutions*.

Macmillan, 1996 Nineteen essays by contemporary biographers, describing their problems and solutions. Very readable.

Batchelor, John. *The Art of Literary Biography*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995.

Seventeen essays by distinguished writers , including Richard Holmes, and Hermione Lee. Includes Storr on Psychiatry and Literary Biography, and two essays on Virginia Woolf.

Holroyd, Michael. *Works on Paper – The Craft of Biography and Autobiography*. Counterpoint, Washington, 2002.

Collected essays and reviews by the distinguished biographer of Shaw, Lytton Strachey and Augustus John. The witty ‘The Case against Biography,’ in which he acts as devil’s advocate is especially interesting.

Lee, Hermione, *Body Parts: Essays in Life Writing*. Chatto and Windus, 2005.

Author of award winning biographies of Virginia Woolf and Willy Cather.

Schlutz, N T. *Handbook of Psychobiography*. OUP, 2005. Virtually the only book of its kind, gives an up to date selection of psychologists’ views on the subject.

Parke, Catherine N. *Biography: Writing Lives*, Routledge, 2002.

The best introduction to the subject in print. Up-to-date, and available in paperback.

France, Peter and St Clair William. *Mapping Lives – The Uses of Biography*.

OUP, 2002. Another collection of essays. Deals with artists, thinker and writers, and not confined to works in English.

### Some recommended biographies

I confine myself to biographies I have read myself in recent years, and which are in print. The essential masterpieces are mostly mentioned in the short history section above.

Sisman, Adam. *Boswell’s Presumptuous Task*. Penguin Books , 2001.

A fine example of ‘selective biography’, concentrating on one aspect of Boswell’s life - the writing of his *Life of Johnson*. An unputdownable, prize winning achievement.

Glendinning, Victoria, *Leonard Woolf*. Simon and Schuster, 2006.

A fine biography of a talented man, often only mentioned as the husband of his famous wife.

Ashton, Rosemary. *Thomas and Jane Carlyle - Portrait of a Marriage*. Chatto and Windus, 2001.

An unusual joint biography, which makes use of the collected letters of the Carlyles to give a vivid and well –researched portrait of both her subjects.

MacCarthy, Fiona. *Byron – Life and Legend*, Faber and Faber, 2003.

Probably the best single volume biography, containing much fresh research, especially on his sex life.

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