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Biofiction Institutionalized

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Monographs and anthologies devoted to biofiction have multiplied over the past twenty years. Testifying to the institutionalization of the genre, Routledge has now allotted it a *Companion* next to established scholarly topics such as "migration literature," "global Chaucer," and "queer literary studies." In their introduction, the editors offer the present volume as a "collection of diverse perspectives" on a form that they describe as "perplexing and elusive" (p. 1). Their goal is to provide a "truly international and interactive exploration" of the genre, as well as to establish its specificity in relation to neighboring types of discourse such as "biography, the historical novel, the *roman-à-clef*, and historiographic metafiction" (p. 5). In line with these objectives, the anthology includes seven parts covering aspects of biofiction that extend from the form's histories and theories to its national models and political functions, as well as to case studies and finally to authorial reflections. Since I obviously cannot delve into detail into each of the twenty-seven chapters that make up the work, I will focus on the essays that in my view have some relation to the field this journal is most attentive to – interdisciplinary narrative studies. In conclusion I will briefly review some of the issues that this new *Companion* raises, both as an anthology and about the genre that it purports to survey.

Histories

The authors of the essays in the first part of the volume, "Histories of Biofiction," have a common purpose. Their intent is to demonstrate that biofiction, though obviously a recent label (it was coined in 1990 by the French literary theorist Alain Buisine), does not constitute a postmodern phenomenon. For them, the genre has a history, which they set out to describe not by tracing its successive stages in an all-inclusive manner, but by focusing on what they take to be – across centuries – similar ways of combining factual and fictional discourses. Interrogating biofiction's origins, the classicist Nora Goldschmidt thus argues that the genre is already "detectable" in the "very tradition of life-writing" that became "the basis of the genres of biography and history against which

modern biofiction has come to define itself" (p. 20). Greek "biois" and Latin "vitae" of statesmen, she contends, were not "historiae." They mixed statements grounded in evidence with "creative reconstructions" of such things as "inner lives" (p. 23) and "scenes based on imaginative reconstruction" (p. 24). Similarly, Antiquity had a tradition of "poet's Lives" (p. 25), which had to work with only a small number of facts. Goldschmidt uses the adjective "creative" to describe not only the biographies produced in Greece about Homer, Sophocles, and Sappho, but also the form of "life-writing" practiced in Rome by Suetonius – a form that tied the "biographical subjects" (e.g., Terence, Virgil, and Horace) to the "subject matter of their poetry" (p. 27).

Skipping several centuries, the next two essays deal respectively with Nietzsche and works that Enlightenment writers have devoted to Christopher Columbus. Michael Lackey argues that Nietzsche invented the form of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in order to oppose Wagner's theory of truth and formulate his own. More precisely, Nietzsche, according to Lackey, does not seek to provide readers with definitive "Truths" in this work; he models instead "the process by which truth is constructed," while "deconstructing the approach of demagogues like Wagner" and "cautioning" the composer's "would-be-disciples" (p. 45). Arguing, as Lackey does, that biofictions often have an agenda, Ina Schabert sets forth to analyze several of the many biographies that eighteenth-century writers have produced about Columbus. These "Columbiads," she maintains, offer "exemplary cases of ideologically induced life-writing" (p. 57). Assigning Columbus "a prominent role in the universal propagation of the Christian religion," they also make him "stand for various national ideas of historical progress": a progress that consists, in the Swiss *Colombona,* of the development of "international trade," in the English *Columbiad,* of the adoption of the "political and moral values of Britishness," and in the American *Vision of Columbus*, of the continuation of the "freedom-trail that leads to the founding of the United States" (p. 68). Not entirely oblivious to the Enlightenment's ideals, however, these biographies at times also express some misgivings, especially about the "fatal consequences" of Columbus's "achievements for the indigenous American peoples" (p. 68).

Theories

The essays in the second part of the anthology first aim to define biofiction by setting its boundaries in contrast to neighboring genres. Laurent Demanze thus explains why the French call *exofiction* what English-language theory designates as biofiction, and his account is both historical and cultural. While British and American critics, he argues, defined biofiction with regard to biography, their French peers (in this instance Philippe Vasset in 2011) coined "exofiction" as a "counterpoint to autofiction" (p. 94): the genre pioneered in France by Serge Doubrovsky, in which author, narrator, and main character have the same iden-

tity as they do in autobiography, though the author no longer commits him/herself to providing information that is truthful and open to verification. The French literary scene, Demanze continues, got tired of "introspection"; it turned to texts in which writers "analyze the psyches of their neighbours" not their own (p. 96). Similarly looking at what may distinguish French biofiction from its Anglo-American counterpart, Dominique Rabaté holds in his essay that these two versions of the genre deal in contrasting ways with what he calls the "unattestable" (p. 193). Whereas English-language novelists seek to fill holes, the French visit the archives to "report on their deficiencies, to point out their missing and secret parts" (p. 185). Rabaté gives as an example Michel Schneider's *Glenn Gould piano solo* (1988), which does not attempt to make up for the main lack in Gould's biography: the "failure of all testimony" in the face of the musician's decision in 1964, at age 32, to no longer appear on stage (p. 186). The specificity of Schneider's work, according to Rabaté, consists in merely identifying the "unattestable": pointing to the gap without attempting to fill it, that is, without justifying Gould's decision by entering his or other characters' minds, as many authors of biofiction would probably do.

In a related essay, "Counterfactual Biofictions: Writing Against History," Alison James accounts for the connections and differences between the two genres referred to in her title. Whereas counterfactual history, she argues, poses the question "what if?", biofiction is grounded in an assertion involving "as if" (p. 132). That is, its practitioners do not formulate hypotheses; they report past events "as if" these events had unfolded as the texts state that they did. Yet biofiction, for James, may include a counterfactual component, which, depending on its textual place and range, she calls "alternate history" (p. 136) or "minimal counterfactuals" (p. 140). She takes as an example of large-scale alternate history Laurent Binet's *Civilizations* (2019), in which the Inca Emperor Atahualpa, far from being murdered by the Spaniards, "invades and conquers sixteenth-century Europe" (p. 136). As for minimal counterfactuals, James sees several occurrences of them in Lola Lafon's *The Little Communist Who Never Smiled* (2014), which stages the Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci. Lafon, in this text, puts at times "counterfactual conditionals" in Comaneci's mouth (or mind), making her ask such questions as "If I had lived the kind of normal life you have, where would I be today?" (Lafon quoted by James, p. 141). Utterances of this type, however, are infrequent in Lafon's novel; they do not proceed from an initial "what if" that would have generated an entirely different Comaneci life-story.

While Demanze, Rabaté, and James define biofiction in relation to bordering genres such as *exofiction* and counterfactual history, Lucia Boldrini's aim is to assess the status of the figures who, in biofiction, are designated by their proper names. Observing that theories of character oppose representational (or mimetic) and non-representational (or autonomous) poles, she contends that the "conflation" between the linguistic construct and the real person is "central to the aesthetics and ethics of the genre" (p. 75). The problem, then, becomes to figure out the exact nature of this "conflation," that is, to determine what authors

add to, or retract from, what is known of the individuals' "prior existence" (p. 78). Boldrini, to make her point, focuses on texts that question the very concept of character: Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, the biography of a dog, and Zoë Wicomb's *Still Life*, which stages as ghosts the South African poet Thomas Pringle and Mary Prince, the author of *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*. Featuring a dog as a character, Boldrini maintains, allows Woolf to illustrate the conflict between "anthropocentrism and decentering of the human" (p. 88). As for ghosts of historical individuals, they invite us to revisit ("haunt") the past by making a character a "verbal and artistic construct," one that can "carry the plot" without losing his/her "historical ontological fullness" (p. 92).

Though included in the same section of the anthology as the preceding essays, Robert Dion's, Lorenzo Marchese's, and Hanna Meretoja's contributions are less theoretical than thematic. Dion looks at the way authors write about their colleagues, in this instance, at the way novelists come up with fictional accounts of the lives of other novelists. Similarly, asking "whether the difference between biography and biofiction can be detected in the endings" (p. 149), Lorenzo Marchese sets up a typology. Taking examples in French, Italian, and Latin American literatures, he shows how the moment of death can, in biofiction, be represented as an epiphany, as the epitome of life's lack of meaning, and finally be erased. Hanna Meretoja illustrates the thesis of her contribution – i.e., that biofiction is an "art of the possible" (p. 167) – with reference to Johanna Venho's *The First Lady*: the story of a few days in the life of Sylvi Kekkonen, the wife of former Finnish President Urho Kekkonen, who lived in the shadow of her famous husband whose activities as a writer Venho's biofiction brings to light.

Models

In their introduction, the editors state that the essays in this part of the anthology ask whether texts that fall under the label "biofiction," while "published in a national language by national publishers," also have "national characteristics" (p. 9). Answering this question with respect to Italy, Riccardo Castellana observes that the genre has gone through an evolution in this country. More precisely, it has developed along three main stages: an attempt to "renew the [historical] novel […] from a biographical perspective" that stretches "from the 1940s to the early 1990s" (p. 209); a postmodern moment that extends from the late 1980s to the early 2000s; and a "reaction to postmodernism," most obvious over the past twenty years (p. 210). Italian biofiction, Castellana states in a conclusion that could apply to biofiction as a whole, finds itself in the situation of genres that have "established themselves," but now "find it difficult to continue the exploration of narrative possibilities" (p. 211). Considering the state of French biofiction in the twenty-first century, Alexandre Gefen is less concerned with tracing the changes the genre may have been subjected to in his country

than describing what he calls its "extraordinary formal variety" (p. 216). He points to French novelists' taste for intertextual games, most obvious in such works as Pierre Michon's *Rimbaud the Son* (2013) and Michel Schneider's *Marilyn's Last Sessions* (2011), variations on the numerous biographies of the poet and the actress. He also stresses the authors' interest in otherness, exemplified in Céline Minard's *Olimpia* (2010), the life story of the prostitute who was the muse of Pope Innocent X, and Régis Jauffret's *Dans le ventre de Klara* (2024), a novel about the pregnancy of Hitler's mother.

The other two essays in this part of the anthology are less concerned with biofiction's national features than with texts written by authors, or staging characters, who experienced problems in their home country that caused them to move. Noting that the concept of "transnationalism" has grown in importance in the humanities and social sciences, Marleen Rensen analyzes biographical novels in which artists and intellectuals, travelling by inclination or necessity, constitute "diasporic communities" (p. 223). Treating texts written by German authors (e.g., Klaus Mann's *Pathetic Symphony* [1948]) or bearing on German figures (e.g., Jay Parini's *Benjamin's Crossing* [1996]), she claims that biofiction conveys the specificity of characters' state of mind, in this instance, both the "suffering from national exclusion and the experience of a transnational life" (p. 241). Similarly, Silvia Salino does not ask whether there is a Chinese mode of biofiction and what its traits might be. She examines in her essay texts written about a major personality in Chinese politics and culture, Jiang Qing, who as Mao Zedong's fourth wife became a member of the Chinese Politburo and the director of the Central Cultural Revolution Group. A specialist in sinology, Salino examines US-based Chinese playwright Binghao Zhao's *The Revolutionary Model Play 2.0* (2015), a multilingual and multiethnic production staged in Singapore, and Chinese-American writer Anchee Min's biographical novel *Becoming Madame Mao* (2001). The merit of these works, for Salino, is to provide a new slant on a period now often maligned, and, in a way more effective than that of a standard biography, to "recuperate" a figure largely forgotten in the West (p. 259).

Politics

Although several contributions to the anthology are implicitly concerned with power, the chapters in this part touch on the way biofiction may directly intervene, conferring agency to, and depicting the daily life of, groups that have left few traces in the archives. Not unexpectedly, these essays analyze texts that represent characters and situations within a colonial or postcolonial context. Focusing on Saidiya Hartman, Vilashini Cooppan examines what the novelist and scholar of African American culture calls "critical fabulation" (p. 265): a genre, situated at the edge of biofiction, which combines factual records with creative fiction. Taking two examples from Hartman's work, she first looks at *Lose Your Mother. A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007), a novel that tosses fiction

together with testimonies and excerpts from the history of the slave trade. She then turns to *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), in which fiction is mixed with trial transcripts, prison case files, and psychiatric notes to render the lives of young black women in the early twentieth century. These works, according to Cooppan, show how biofiction may supplement archives marked by "paucity, incompletion, and ideological veiling" (p. 272). That is, retrieving from oblivion the "experience of the unknown," how it may – in a fashion better than that of historical inquiries – provide insight into what "minor lives" were like (p. 272).

Arguing along the same lines, Alexandra Effe emphasizes that biofiction allows "perspectivization," by which she means the production of a narrative that "changes who is allowed to tell a given story, which voices we hear, and through whose eyes we see" (p. 281). Effe first gives as an example of multi-perspectival narration J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), a text "written in the first-person voice of a female castaway" that "intertwines" stories about Defoe himself and several of his characters, beginning with Robinson and Friday (p. 281). She then moves to Petina Gappah's *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* (2019), which recounts, relying on diverse points of view (including those of two African servants), how the remains of explorer and missionary David Livingstone were carried from Zambia to the coast and then shipped back to England. These novels, Effe insists, do not aim to "right the record," for instance, to show that the writings of Livingstone quoted in *Out of Darkness* are flawed; they seek to destabilize "the idea of a single story and definitive meaning" (p. 286). Allowing multiple perspectives to coexist, according to Effe, makes postcolonial biofiction a "powerful cultural agent," one that challenges both "stories told in history books" and "universal verities" (p. 293).

Whereas Cooppan and Effe examine works in which biofiction is used to offer the vantage point of representatives of the lower classes and victims of colonialism, Catherine Padmore and Kelly Gardiner take up novels that stage the privileged, in this instance, women who in the early nineteenth century were involved in the colonization of Australia. Specifically, Padmore and Gardiner analyze the account of the achievements of Jane Franklin, the wife of the lieutenant-governor of the British penal colony of Van Diemen's Land, in Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008); of Elizabeth Macarthur, the wife of the founder of the Australian wool industry, in Kate Grenville's *A Room Made of Leaves* (2020); and of Elizabeth Macquarie, the wife of the governor who arrived in the colony in 1809, in Luke Slattery's *Mrs M* (2017). Biofiction, Padmore and Gardiner assert, makes it possible to correct a history that is "mainly about men," in this case, to establish "the significance of women's contribution" to the colonization of Australia; a contribution that Flanagan's, Grenville's, and Slattery's novels describe as mixed, since it could be positive. The setting up of schools is also complicit with colonial mechanisms that brought about "ferocious suffering" and "monstrous deaths" (p. 310). To produce some balance, Padmore and Gardiner end their essay with an analysis of Julie Janson's *Benevolence* (2020): a book by an author of Aboriginal origin which describes the colonists' culture as experienced by a native child who goes through such "terrifying" moments as being shown

around by her very patron, Elizabeth Macquarie, the school she is about to attend (p. 313). The fictional child here encounters a real figure of the colony, a person who – colonialism being neither "totalising" nor "coherent" – shows both "settler benevolence" and complicity with the brutal "mechanisms of education" instituted by the imperial power (p. 313).

Case Studies

The essays in the last two parts of the anthology, "Biofictional Case Studies" and "Activating Lives: Early Modern Women," can in my view be approached as a whole, since they do not identify theoretical issues or formal characteristics proper to biofiction that were not covered in the preceding chapters. Consisting mainly of close readings, they focus on texts that depict communities or individuals, some well-known, some overlooked for reasons having to do with race, class, or gender. One of these communities, certainly not passed over in intellectual history, is the Bloomsbury Group, whose members (specifically Virginia and Leonard Woolf and the economist John Maynard Keynes) are represented as ghosts in novels that Todd Avery examines in his essay, "Haunted by Woolfs." At the other end of the spectrum, several pieces probe novels portraying groups whose contributions have not been given credit as they should. The part of the *Companion* titled "Activating Lives" is thus about women who, though less well-known than their male counterparts, were active as painters and writers during the British and Italian Renaissance, and even the High Middle Ages. Bethany Layne and Virginia Newhall Rademacher both probe Maggie O'Farrell's *The Marriage Portrait* (2022), which transforms Lucrezia de' Medici from the subject of a famous painting into an artist who, escaping her husband, manages to flee to Venice, where she finds "fame for creating miniatures" (p. 418). Similarly, Layne looks at the way O'Farrell, in *Hamnet* (2020), portrays Shakespeare's wife Anne as an accomplished herbalist and healer, an expertise to which Layne surmises the playwright owes his "use of plant imagery" (p. 413). Moving to figures in literary history, Newhall Rademacher focuses in the second part of her essay on *Matrix* (2021), Lauren Groff's work about "perhaps the greatest woman author of the Middle Ages," Marie de France (p. 438). Groff takes the poet much beyond what we know about her life (all that is known for certain is that she frequented the court of Henry II and Eleanor) to make her into a "queer, ungainly half-sister to the king," who, exiled to a monastery, transforms it into a "fully female enclave" (p. 440). "Queering," Newhall Rademacher points out, does not only apply to the space that Marie creates; it also in self-reflexive manner defines Groff's work and more generally biofiction itself, whose goal is to mix genres in order to produce an "imaginative counter-history" (p. 440).

While Avery, Layne, and Newhall Rademacher delve into biofictions that represent established or unfairly silenced communities of artists, writers, and scholars, Andreas Gelz probes texts that picture an entirely different world: sport.

These texts' innovative contribution to the genre, according to Gelz, lies in emphasizing the "dimension of corporeality," that is, the fact that athletes have a "body" and are involved in "physical action" (p. 354). Having pointed to this thematic core, Gelz sets out to review the different facets of biographical novels whose topic is athletic performance: (a) their reliance on the genre to describe the relations between sport and the historical context (e.g., Jean Echenoz's *Running* [2009], about the impact of political changes in Czechoslovakia between 1940 and 1970 on the runner Emil Zatopek); (b) their focus not on an individual but on an event (e.g., Louis Nucéra's *Mes Rayons de soleil* [1987], about the 1949 Tour de France); and (c) their taste for a particular type of competition (e.g., Norman Mailer's *The Fight* [1975], about the 1974 "Rumble in the Jungle" boxing match Ali vs. Foreman [p. 359]). Gelz also pays special attention to formal traits of sport biofiction, beginning with plot structures. He notes the frequency of the "rise and fall of the hero" storyline, exemplified in Philippe Brunel's *Vie et mort de Marco Pantani* (2007), about the Italian cyclist who in 1998 won both the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France, but was then suspended for doping and died from a cocaine overdose at age 34. Moving from plot to voice, Gelz highlights another characteristic of sport biofiction: the repeated interventions through which the author tells how he/she got interested in sport or links his/her experience with those of the athlete (e.g., *Zidane's Melancholy* [2007], in which Jean-Philippe Toussaint associates the aging footballer's inability to make new plays with his own declining creativity). These "metatextual and self-reflexive" commentaries, Gelz concludes, often turn the text into a kind of *Bildungsroman*, one in which novelists assess how their interest in sport, or practice of it, has contributed to the kind of person they have become (p. 365).

Besides communities, authors of biofiction also commonly stage individuals for the purpose of bringing to light aspects of their lives that standard biographies have suppressed or been unable to reconstruct. Virginia Woolf, for example, already present in novels devoted to the Bloomsbury Group, has generated what Monica Latham calls "Woolf-centric biofiction" (p. 340): several plays (e.g., Edna O'Brien's *Vita and Virginia* [1998]) and novels (e.g., Maggie Gee's *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* [2014]) that their authors use to make Virginia into a "spokesperson" for their own "personal, aesthetic, social, and political concerns" (p. 350). The most popular personality to be featured in biofiction, however, remains Jesus, who according to Stephanie Russo's count has, in the last century, been the subject of over 400 novels that elaborate on the gospels. Obviously compelled to be selective, Russo engages with three recent works in her essay: Christopher Moore's *Lamb. The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal* (2002), in which a friend of Jesus, resurrected in the year 2000, provides the world with "an updated Gospel for a new millennium" (p. 385); Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (2010), which imagines that Mary delivered twins representing the opposing forces of Jesus, "pacifist, a champion of the poor and the disadvantaged," and Christ, the founder of the "institution of Christianity, [...] a betrayal of the historic Jesus's values and mission" (p. 398); and Naomi Alderman's *The Liars' Gospel* (2012), in which four narrators present

Jesus as a "shadowy, difficult, even off-putting figure," akin to a "modern cult leader surrounded by a group of increasingly fanatical followers" (p. 390). Russo stresses that while these works present a "new, surprising, and even shocking vision of Jesus," they are also "self-reflexive" (p. 392). That is, as authors of biofiction frequently do, the authors of these works at times comment on the activity of writing, more particularly on the "fictionalization process" that for them is always involved in any biographical endeavor (p. 392).

I am including under "case studies" the five texts that make up the last part of the anthology, "Authorial Reflections." Three of these texts consist of interviews. Laura Cernat talks to Anne Enright about *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* and to the Flemish writer Koen Peeters, an author well-known in the Netherlands but whose works have not been translated from Dutch into French or English. As for Alexandre Gefen, he prompts Pierre Michon to clarify his move from "small lives" to biographical novels. Without interviewer mediation, Naomi J. Miller justifies her decision to focus, in *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020), on scientist and published author Mary Sidney Herbert, and, in *Strange Labyrinth* (forthcoming), on England's first female fiction writer, Mary Sidney Wroth. Similarly, though more concerned with shedding light on issues of writing than on choices of topic, Bárbara Mujica tells how she was led to assign the function "narrator" to Velasquez's model in *I Am Venus* (2013), to a lower-rank nun in *Sister Teresa* (2007), and to Frida Kahlo's sister Cristina in *Frida* (2001). The problem, she explains, was to find "an angle, a perspective that clearly distorts the character and the account" (p. 503). Mujica thus explicitly comments on what DVD supplements call the "making of," placing readers into the very process of writing in a way that students of narrative may find more relevant than expanding once again on the reasons that made this or that group or character worth writing about.

To Conclude

To readers of *DIEGESIS* who are not or only marginally familiar with biofiction, this *Companion* will provide an extensive introduction to the genre. It will show, in particular, that biographical fiction is not a postmodern phenomenon, that it is not restricted to the novel (it also comprises plays, poems, and films), and that its topics are most inclusive (the people whose life stories it (re)tells belong to the whole gamut of genders, races, ethnicities, social classes, and sexual preferences). Those same readers, however, may be frustrated by the fact that the editors' introduction raises expectations that are not always met, and that several of the essays involve theoretical problems that are not fully investigated. In a brief conclusion, I want to take up three issues that concern first the *Companion* as an anthology, then biofiction as a genre.

The editors, in their introduction, offer the anthology as a "truly international" exploration of the genre (p. 5), a description that the work itself does not

entirely support. Of course, nothing is easier – while assessing endeavors of this kind – than picking up on what the label "truly international" might fail to include. Still, I feel compelled to note that two major literatures are poorly represented. The only essay devoted to Latin America, Katia Ouriachi's "Confronting Evil Through Literature," concerns novels by Roberto Bolaño and Patricio Pron that are not biofictions proper, since they consist of inquiries into the lives of imaginary characters. Similarly, readers familiar with the German literary scene may be surprised that the most frequent mentions of German biofiction should be of novels of the 1930s, such as Broch's *The Death of Vergil* and Klaus Mann's *Pathetic Symphony*. There is no analysis of, or even reference to, the works in which Michael Kumpfmüller, Christa Wolf, and Ralph Dutli play with the biographies of Kafka, Kleist, and Soutine, respectively. The only piece of German twenty-first century biofiction to be examined in detail is Daniel Kehlmann's *Tyll* (2017), which Bárbara Mujica (in her "authorial reflection") praises for making the fictional trickster provide the "view from the bottom" to actual dignitaries such as Friedrich V, King of Bohemia and Gustav Adolf, King of Sweden (p. 508). As a whole the anthology must be counted as Anglo-American-centric, a feature that only partially reflects the fact that English-speaking countries are the ones that both produce and consume most of the works that today come under the label "biofiction."

When it comes to biofiction as a genre, two of the many issues that the anthology raises deserve in my view to be taken up. The first one bears on the figure of the inscribed reader. Effe, in her essay on perspectivization, states that biofiction "demands that, in reading, we compare different versions of a story, whether articulated within a given text or not" (p. 281). Yet Effe, under "we," refers here to actual readers, who while perusing Coetzee's *Foe* (one of Effe's examples) should know about Defoe and his work, or be willing to research them, to make sense of the games that are played in this novel. Effe does not, however, consider the assumed expertise of the inscribed reader, that is, of the reader whose profile can be reconstructed looking at the information that in the text itself helps compare the "different versions" of the story. One can thus think of an essay that, focusing on a specific corpus (e.g., biofiction about the Bloomsbury Group or Shakespeare's family), would ask what kind of reader is posited in these texts, more precisely, how much historical and literary competence is granted to him/her and what are, in the text itself, the signs of this competence. Questions of this type are crucial for biofiction, since the genre, as Effe correctly argues, is essentially intertextual, requiring readers to be aware that there are other versions of the cultural product than the one they have in front of them.

The second issue about biofiction worth considering since it is frequently raised in the anthology is not textual, but ontological. It pertains to the genre's truth status. The editors, to quote their introduction once again, claim that biofiction provides a "deeper truth," one that cannot "be simply inferred from the hard facts" and presents itself in the form of a "truth of personality," a "poetic truth," or "even a broader social or existential truth" (pp. 3–4). The index reveals

no fewer than 112 instances of the term "truth" (i.e., one every 4.7 pages), often co-occurring with qualifiers such as "authoritative" (p. 292), "biographical" (p. 347), "emotional" (p. 170), "essential" (p. 304), "fictional" (p. 265), "hidden" (p. 432), "historical" (p. 142), "individual" (p. 91), "multiple" (p. 293), "silenced" (p. 343), and "symbolic" (p. 380). The phrase "truth contract" also occurs four times (pp. 20, 24, 414, 425), but it is applied to biography; that is, to a genre in which the initial agreement between author and reader implies that the text is grounded in documentary research, and that the individual statements that it submits can be verified (plot structures pose different problems). What is missing from the *Companion*, therefore, is an analysis of the exact nature of the "poetic," "emotional," or "symbolic" truth that supposedly characterizes biofiction, more precisely, of the type of contract that binds the genre to readers, or rather, in Michel Foucault's terms, of that genre's "truth regime" (1980, 133). The subject "biofiction" is certainly not exhausted, which should be good news to the many scholars who – as this anthology impressively shows – are now attending to it.

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