



university of  
 groningen

faculty of arts

# Different Lives

Global Perspectives  
on Biography  
in Public Cultures  
and Societies



Biography Conference  
September 19-21, 2018



## About the Conference

"Different Lives: Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies" is an international conference organized by the Biography Institute, the Biography Society and Biographer's International Organization. It will take place from September 19 to 21, 2018, in Groningen, the Netherlands. Over the course of three days, biographers and other experts are going to take a look beyond their own borders and delve deeper into the question of how the art of biography is practiced in other parts of the world. The focus will be on themes such as the political impact of the biography, censorship, the history of the book, and the critical reception of biography. The goal is to learn more about how biography can contribute to a better understanding of differences between societies and cultures. How can biographers from different parts of the world learn from each other? Speakers from all over the world will inform us about the history and the state of the art concerning

biography in their own country. They will demonstrate how biography functions as a truly public genre, featuring specific societal issues and the way biography shapes public opinion in specific cultural backgrounds.

All featured speakers will present from a wealth of different perspectives, contributing to the discussion in a mix of panels, roundtables, and public discussions. Richard Holmes (UK) will provide the keynote lecture for this conference. We will also hear from Evgeniya Petrova (Russia), Joanny Moulin (France), Elsbeth Etty (the Netherlands), Phuong Ngoc Nguyen (Vietnam), Lindie Koorts (South Africa), Daniel Meister (Canada), Doug Munro (New Zealand), María Jesús González (Spain), Sahar Vahdati Hosseinian (Iran), Yannick Gouchan (Italy), and Étienne Naveau (Indonesia). Carl Rollyson (US) will provide a lecture and Nigel Hamilton will host a masterclass for young biographers working on their first books. Additionally, he has agreed to open the conference with a lecture titled "Truth, Lies, and Fake Truth: The Future of Biography." The conference will open with a reception on Wednesday, and close with a conference dinner on Friday.

This conference was made possible by contributions from:



The Biography Society  
La Société de Biographie



## SEPTEMBER 19

12<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

**Masterclass** by Nigel Hamilton

16<sup>30</sup> – 17<sup>30</sup>

**Opening Lecture** by Nigel Hamilton

*Truth, Lies and Fake Truth.*

*The Future of Biography.*

with word of welcome by Frans Zwarts

17<sup>30</sup> – 18<sup>30</sup>

**Reception**

Offered by Groningen Congres Bureau

## SEPTEMBER 20

10<sup>00</sup>

**Conference Opening**

by Hans Renders and Joanny Moulin

10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>

**Panel 1** chaired by David Veltman

Carl Rollyson (US)

Evgeniya Petrova (Russia)

Joanny Moulin (France)

11<sup>30</sup> – 12<sup>30</sup>

**Panel 2** chaired by Joanny Moulin

Elsbeth Etty (the Netherlands)

Daniel Meister (Canada)

Phuong Ngoc Nguyen (Vietnam)

12<sup>45</sup> – 14<sup>00</sup>

**Mystery Guest** at Academy Building

14<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

**Roundtable Discussion** with John A. Farrell

Topics: political impact of biography, institutions and status of the biographer, the biopic, categories of biography, biography and orality.

Lindie Koorts (South Africa)

Doug Munro (New Zealand)

María Jesús González (Spain)

Yannick Gouchan (Italy)

Étienne Naveau (Indonesia)

16<sup>00</sup> – 17<sup>00</sup>

**Keynote Lecture** by Richard Holmes

*The Biographer's Handshake*

17<sup>30</sup>

**Drinks** at Conference Venue

## SEPTEMBER 21

10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>

**Panel 3** chaired by Madelon Franssen

Sahar Vahdati Hosseini (Iran)

Doug Munro (Australia)

María Jesús González (Spain)

11<sup>30</sup> – 13<sup>00</sup>

**Roundtable Discussion** with Patrick Di Mascio

Topics: biography and censorship, the critical reception of the biography, biography and psychology, biography and history.

Carl Rollyson (US)

Daniel Meister (Canada)

Elsbeth Etty (the Netherlands)

Stefano Magni (Italy)

Raffaele Ruggiero (Italy)

# Conference Program

The main conference venue is  
the **Doopsgezinde Kerk**  
(Oude Boteringestraat 33)

14<sup>00</sup> – 14<sup>30</sup>

**Interview**

with the winner of Dutch Biography Prize

14<sup>30</sup> – 15<sup>30</sup>

**Panel 4** chaired by Nigel Hamilton

Lindie Koorts (South Africa)

Yannick Gouchan (Italy)

Étienne Naveau (Indonesia)

15<sup>45</sup> – 16<sup>30</sup>

**Public Discussion** with Hans Renders

18<sup>00</sup>

**Conference Dinner** at Humphrey's

## Additional Information

### Biography as a Corrective

**Masterclass**  
**September 19**  
12<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

On September 19, 2018, Dr Nigel Hamilton, author of award-winning biographies of Fieldmarshall Montgomery, F.D. Roosevelt and J.F. Kennedy, will host a masterclass on his best practices as a biographer. It will give Research Master and PhD students the opportunity to discuss the way biographical research can correct existing historiography. How can 'agency' be used as a hermeneutic device to compare the way different individuals acted during a certain time and place? By reading different samples from Dr Hamilton's biographies, students will investigate the structural incoherence between the agency of an individual, and the mentality of the time in which he or she lived. What makes historical practice comprehensible, if it is not related to some larger structure or development? Students will delve into the debate on what did biographers do to contribute to methodology of Microhistory, in which developments on a small scale can be an analytical framework for a more complex historical phenomenon.

### Dutch Biography Price



### Excursions September 19

On September 18, the *Nederlandse Biografieprijs* (Dutch Biography Prize) will be awarded during a ceremony in the Hodshon Huis in Haarlem. The award is organized in close cooperation with the Koninklijke Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen. The winner will be interviewed during the Biography Conference.

For those who are interested to see what Groningen and the Netherlands have to offer, we have organized two cultural trips on Wednesday. At GRID, the Museum of Printing in the city center, you can get a tour of Dutch historic printing and bookbinding. Or you could visit the memorial center and grounds of Kamp Westerbork, an exhibition depicting the Netherlands during World War II, focusing on the persecution of the Jews. You can express your interest in visiting one of these sites while booking your tickets.





## Important Addresses

**Doopsgezinde Kerk**  
(Main Conference Venue)  
Oude Boteringestraat 33

**Biography Institute**  
Oude Boteringestraat 32

**Academy Building**  
Broerstraat 5

**Humphrey's Restaurant**  
Vismarkt 42

## Contact Information

**Biography Institute**  
[biografie.instituut@rug.nl](mailto:biografie.instituut@rug.nl)

**Prof. Hans Renders**  
(Director of the Biography Institute)  
t: +31 6 5321 6666  
e: [j.w.renders@rug.nl](mailto:j.w.renders@rug.nl)

## Organizing Committee



### Hans Renders

Hans is the director of the Biography Institute and holds a chair in History and Theory of Biography; vice president of the Biographical Society; editor-in-chief of the book series Biography Studies (Brill); editor at *ZL. Literary-historical magazine*; book critic for *Het Parool*; he provides a monthly column on biography with his 'Leven in Letters', which can be heard every third Sunday of the month on the radio program *Met het Oog op Morgen*; he is member of the Board of Stichting Het Biografisch Portaal van Nederland; member of the Board Biographers International Organization (BIO); member of the board De Nederlandse Biografieprijs; member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Ludwig Boltzmann

Institute for the History and Theory of Biography (Vienna); member of the Best Biography Awards committee for BIO Best Biography of the Year (Plutarch Award 2018).

He publishes on theory and biography, e.g. *Theoretical Discussions of Biography* (with Binne de Haan, Brill, Boston/Leiden 2014) and *The Biographical Turn, Lives in History* (with Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma, Routledge, London/New York 2017); he published two full-length biographies (Jan Hanlo (1998), Jan Campert (2004)) and is now working on the biography of Theo van Doesburg (in collaboration with Sjoerd van Faassen).

### Madelon Franssen

Madelon recently finished her MA degree at the University of Groningen. She studied American Studies, as well as Writing, Editing, and Mediating. During her studies, she completed the university's Honours College, focusing specifically on the role of religion in the public domain. Furthermore, she went on a foreign exchange, which allowed her to study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for one semester.

Her research focuses on biographies within their social contexts. In her MA thesis, *From Poet-Naturalist to Radical Dissenter*, Madelon compared three biographies written about Henry David Thoreau during three different time periods. By pointing out the myriad ways biographers construct a life story that reflects the biographer's own cultural setting, she was able to conclude that biographies are true products of their time. Madelon is especially interested in studying the biographer's authorial decisions, interpretations, and place within a historical context.

### David Veltman

David works as a PhD student at the Biography Institute (University of Groningen) on a biography of the Flemish artist Felix de Boeck (1898-1995). In his biography, questions will be raised about his relation to the avant-garde of his time. At an early age, De Boeck decided to earn his living as a farmer, in order to be independent from art galleries and museums. This decision will be used as a framework to examine the way his artistic development was of influence to the evolution of his political views. Special attention will be given to how biography can show the

interface between the artist's self-representation and the shifting place of the artist in society. Together with Hans Renders, David wrote the yearly report for the Netherlands in the International Year in Review issue of the journal *Biography* (2017).

David has a Master's degree in Dutch modern literature. After graduating in 2005, he worked eight years in the Haarlem based auction house Bubb Kuyper. There he specialized in Dutch private presses and fine printing. He is freelance reporter for the Dutch artist's magazines *Atelier* and *kM (Artist's Material)*.





## Double Dutch: The Art of Presidential Biography

**Panel**  
September 20  
10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>

**Roundtable Discussion**  
September 21  
11<sup>30</sup> – 13<sup>00</sup>

It has been almost twenty years since Edmund Morris outraged reviewers of presidential biography with his effort to subvert the stodgy genre by inventing a narrator and events that seemed to him the only way to get at his elusive subject. Where to look for precedents in Morris's bold and controversial authorized biography, when the very term, authorized, exalts the old reliable and, so Morris thought, boring narratives when what he wanted to do was be a boffo Boswell. Are there authorized biographers who have gone rogue—and in effect, joined the ranks of the unauthorized, or perhaps we should say, de-authorized? Since 2003, I have reviewed dozens of presidential biographies, and it is time to look at what they have wrought. Is there a way to reverse the rope tied around presidential biography, so that biographers can jump in two different directions at once?

Carl Rollyson, Professor Emeritus of Journalism, at Baruch College, CUNY, has published twelve biographies: *A Real American Character: The Life of Walter Brennan*, *A Private Life of Michael Foot*, *To Be A Woman: The Life of Jill Craigie*, *Amy Lowell Anew: A Biography*, *American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath*, *Hollywood Enigma: Dana Andrews, Marilyn Monroe: A Life of the Actress*, *Lillian Hellman: Her Life and Legend*, *Beautiful Exile: The Life of Martha Gellhorn*, *Norman Mailer: The Last Romantic*, *Rebecca West: A Modern Sibyl*, *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*, and three studies of biography, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism? Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*, *Biography: A User's Guide* and *Confessions of a Serial Biographer*. His reviews of biography appear in *Reading Biography*, *American Biography*, *Lives of the Novelists*, *Essays in Biography* in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The New Criterion* and other newspapers and periodicals.

He has published four biographies for young adults on Pablo Picasso, Marie Curie, Emily Dickinson, and Thurgood Marshall. He is working on *This Alarming Paradox: The Life of William Faulkner* forthcoming from University of Virginia Press and *The Last Days of Sylvia Plath* forthcoming from University Press of Mississippi.

**Carl  
Rollyson**



## Biography in Russia

*“The micro level point of  
 view is really new for the  
 Russian research tradition”*

**Panel**  
 **September 20**  
 **10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>**

The research team of the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” studied the biographies of professionals who worked in the media in 2016 and 2017. The analyses of the empirical base, which consisted of more than 200 biographical texts, made it possible to draw conclusions on not only the specifics of a career in the media, but also the main tendencies of the media sphere in Russia. In our opinion, the study of the most important processes and phenomena in the context of human biographies is a perspective and productive approach.

In recent years, biographical research has become widely accepted in Russia. Nowadays the most popular approach in the system of biographical studies is the sociological point of view. But we think that biographical studies have a high potential in different fields of studying. The micro level point of view is really new for the Russian research tradition. There are a lot of questions concerning the methodological base of the biographical studies.

Evgeniya Petrova is associate professor at the Faculty of Communication Media and of the Design National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. Her way to biographical research went through several stages. In 2010 Evgeniya earned her PhD with her dissertation, which focused on the history of the Russian press. In the study, she used biographical materials from different periods of the history as the important resource of data. In 2012-2016, Evgeniya took part in anthropological project, including expeditions in several Russian regions (such as Moscow, Siberia, and the south of Russia). This experience helped her to pay more attention to the individuals, to their past and present days. Biographical studies have become a continuation of this research trajectory.

## Evgeniya Petrova





## Biography in France

*“Biography has gathered  
 great importance  
 over recent decades,  
 in terms of readership  
 and publishing”*

**Panel**  
 **September 20**  
 **10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>**

Joanny Moulin will present the state of the art of biography in France today, and since the beginning of the 21st century. The French situation has this particularity that there is no equivalent of ‘life-writing’ properly speaking as an academic discipline; ‘récits de vie’ is a different concept, circumscribed to the social sciences, and seen as already passé. Studies centred on autobiography, following in the steps of Philippe Lejeune, have had considerable importance. But biography as a specific literary genre has received as yet little critical attention, although it has gathered great importance over recent decades, in terms of readership and publishing, but also, even more remarkably, as a literary institution, with the foundation of more prizes and awards. Biography in France today is a ‘serious’ literary genre, exerting a strong influence over contemporary fiction, and triggering innovative research in the humanities, because it poses fruitful challenges to the current reflection at the crossroads of several adjacent fields of knowledge.

Joanny Moulin, Senior Member of Institut Universitaire de France, Professor of English literature at Aix-Marseille Université, President of the Biography Society, is currently involved in a research project entitled ‘Biography, Critique of a Literary Genre’, aiming at producing a theory of biography based on the critical study of a corpus of major contemporary biographers in the UK, the US and France. His most recent publications are ‘Lives of the Poets: Poetry & Biography’ in *Études anglaises*, ‘Towards Biography Theory’, in *Cercles*, and, in collaboration with Hans Renders, ‘Great Biographers’ in *The Great Historical Figures in Art and Literature*. In 2007, he published a biography of Ted Hughes, being the first of a series of five biographies: of Charles Darwin, Queen Elisabeth I and II and Seamus Heaney. He was one of the founding members of the Biography Society in 2015. As president of this society, his objective is twofold: on the one hand, to make a significant contribution to the theory of biography by individual and collective research, and, on the other hand, to foster the development of biography studies as a new domain of teaching and research in the perimeter of French anglistics.

**Joanny  
 Moulin**



## Biography in the Netherlands

*"The fact that publishers,  
critics, and historians  
accept unverifiable 'facts'  
is a dangerous development"*

**Panel**  
**September 20**  
**11<sup>30</sup> – 12<sup>30</sup>**

**Roundtable Discussion**  
**September 21**  
**11<sup>00</sup> – 12<sup>30</sup>**

We are now living in an age in which we can state that the 'fragmented' biography is starting to disappear. The same goes for the taboo on intimate facts such as life, sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, and the psychological interpretation of the subject. At the same time, and most likely because of this shift, there is a demand for a thorough foundation of both facts and interpretations.

In the past, revelations about the subject's war history were used to intrigue and create interest in the biography. There is nothing wrong with that. However, precisely these sorts of painful revelations should be based on thorough research, contextualized psychologically and sociologically, and provided with a verifiable foundation.

The Biography in the Netherlands, in the twentieth century, comprises a few important themes, such as World War II and pillarization, two phenomena in which factuality is most important. Biographers who blindly cite 'facts' from literary works and pretend they are the truth, undermine the genre.

The fact that publishers, critics, and historians accept unverifiable 'facts' and do not hold the author responsible, is a dangerous development.

Elsbeth Etty is a Dutch biographer, literary critic, columnist for *De Groene Amsterdammer*, and chair of the Multatuli Genootschap. From 1987 to 2017, she worked as an editor for *NRC Handelsblad*.

## Elsbeth Etty

She studied Dutch language at the VU University Amsterdam. For her biography *Liefde is heel het leven niet – Henriette Roland Holst 1869-1952*, she obtained her doctoral degree cum laude in Utrecht. For this book, she was awarded the Gouden Uil, the Busken Huet Prijs, and she was nominated for the AKO-literatuurprijs. In 2008, her columns earned her the Anne Vondeling Prijs for political journalism. From 2005 to 2015, she was endowed professor at the VU University Amsterdam. She is currently in the process of finishing a biography of the Dutch poet and songwriter Willem Wilmink.



## The Writing of Historical Biography in a Multicultural Canada

**Panel**  
 September 20  
 11<sup>30</sup> – 12<sup>30</sup>

**Roundtable Discussion**  
 September 21  
 11<sup>00</sup> – 12<sup>30</sup>

Canada is a particularly fruitful country through which to study the way the writing of biography is affected by national context and how biography can contribute to a better understanding of difference. Difference, while not a new concept, has taken on heightened importance in recent decades as societies and their leaders struggle with the realities of increasing global migration. Born in Canada, a policy of multiculturalism was originally believed to be the solution to the larger “problem of diversity” and, despite some criticism, it has come to form an integral part of the country’s national identity. This paper assesses the state of historical biography and explores the role of biography in this multicultural context, focusing particularly on the themes of cultural perspective, difference, and understanding.

Daniel R. Meister is a PhD Candidate and Teaching Fellow in the Department of History at Queen’s University whose research interests include modern Canadian history, environmental history, historical biography, and historiography. His recent article, “The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography,” argues for the discipline of history to fully accept biography as a subfield. His dissertation, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, explores the idea of race in the history of Canadian multiculturalism by examining a number of public intellectuals who were in some ways early proponents of tolerance during the interwar period. By taking a biographical approach, which allows for a sustained look at each figure’s life and thought, the study reveals that their understanding of diversity was shaped by the ideas of race and whiteness, and suggests there are parallels between their thinking and the later official policy of multiculturalism.

**Daniel  
 Meister**





## Biography in Vietnam: History and Developments

**Panel**  
**September 20**  
**11<sup>30</sup> – 12<sup>30</sup>**

Biography has a long tradition in Vietnam. The Chinese scholar Sima Qian (145 BCE – 86 BCE) wrote his *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji) consisting of biographies of kings and famous personalities. This model was adopted by Vietnamese biographers since the Chinese domination from 111 BCE to 938 CE. Biography, in the Confucian mind, has to be a ‘mirror’ for the present and future generations; a biography is a story of a person, but we have to tell it as a moral lesson that is useful for all of us.

A more critical tradition in Vietnamese biography began when Vietnamese intellectuals reading French biographies discovered different ways of telling a life. Biography became a way of understanding another human being, not a lesson. But still, you can’t find any biography of Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam comparable to those written by the French historians Lacouture or Brocheux.

Phuong Ngoc (Jade) Nguyen is an associate professor in Vietnamese language and civilization at Aix-Marseille University (AMU) and a member of the Institute for Asian Research (AMU-CNRS). After her thesis, *At the Beginning of Anthropology in Vietnam* (2004), she continued her research on Vietnamese intellectuals and writers, particularly on introducing ideas of science and arts in the colonial Vietnam during the first half of twentieth century. In her recent works, she focuses on the emergence and the development of the modern Vietnamese literature written in *quốc ngữ* (a writing system using the Latin script). Some publications: *A l’origine de l’anthropologie au Vietnam*, Aix-en-Provence, PUR, 2012; *Tân Đà et Rousseau. Réception par des lettrés de formation classique dans le Viêt Nam colonial*, Rousseau studies, Genève, Ed. Stalkine, n°3, 2015; *L’intellectuel comme intermédiaire colonial. Le cas de la Société d’Enseignement Mutuel du Tonkin (1892–1946)*, in Dominique Barjot et Jean-François Klein (eds.), *De l’Indochine coloniale au Viet-Nam actuel*, Magellan & Cie, 2017, p. 221-237.

**Phuong  
Ngoc  
(Jade)  
Nguyen**



## A Country at War with its Symbols: South African Biography in the Post-Apartheid Era

**Roundtable Discussion**

September 20

14<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

**Panel**

September 21

14<sup>30</sup> – 15<sup>30</sup>

South African biography, like its historiography, is dominated by the country's divided past. While the system of apartheid was in place for 46 years, the country has a much longer history of racial discrimination, dispossession and inequality. The advent of democracy in 1994 brought with it an insatiable appetite for stories about the struggle against apartheid. These dominate the South African non-fiction market, which in turn outsells local fiction. While the plethora of struggle biographies fed into a somewhat uncomplicated meta-narrative, in recent years, we have witnessed a new turn. The so-called "decolonisation" movement has led to a society at war with the lingering symbols of its colonial past. Erstwhile heroes are being reappraised, while there are renewed tensions between the veneration for prominent individuals and the role of the "collective." It is in this fraught landscape that South African biographers continue to study past individuals in their own right.

Lindie Koorts is a South African biographer, historian and columnist. She obtained her PhD in History at the University of Stellenbosch, and is currently a senior lecturer at the International Studies Group, University of the Free State. She holds a Newton Advanced Fellowship from the British Academy for her ongoing biographical research of Paul Kruger, the president of the Transvaal at the time of the South African War. Her biography of D.F. Malan, the man who instituted the policy of apartheid, was the first comprehensive biography of an apartheid leader to have been published after the country's turn to democracy in 1994. The book won and was shortlisted for several non-fiction awards, including the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton shortlist, and the KykNET-Rapport shortlist for non-fiction.

**Lindie  
Koorts**



## Biography in New Zealand

*"The tradition of  
scholarly biography  
in New Zealand  
is shallow"*

### Roundtable Discussion

September 20

14<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

### Panel

September 21

10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>

New Zealand has a rich tradition of biographical writing for such a small country. The genre extends across the spectrum, including biographies of politicians, soldiers and figures from the colonial period. For a sports-mad country, there is an unsurprising surfeit of biographies about sporting identities. Conversely, for a country with a reputation of being indifferent at best to artistic endeavour, there are a surprising number on the representative of "high culture" – writers, poets, artists, and musicians.

At the same time, the tradition of scholarly biography in New Zealand is shallow – beginning with the expansion of the universities in the 1960s – and the increase of biographies written by academics has had a generally beneficial effect on the genre, as I will argue. I will also look at publishers' perception of the marketplace as a factor in determining which subjects get biographies, as well as discussing how biographers, and writers generally, make a living in a country with relatively few support structures.

Doug Munro is a New Zealand-based biographer and historian and an adjunct professor at the University of Queensland, Australia. He started as an historian of the Pacific Islands with a PhD from Macquarie University in Sydney, and much of his working life was spent at the University of the South Pacific. It was there that he made a transition into writing biographical studies of Pacific historians and he then branched into biography generally with studies of James Herriot and Sonia Orwell. Between 2005 and 2012, Doug was the researcher for a major project on suicide in twentieth century New Zealand, co-ordinated by John C. Weaver of McMaster University in Canada.

His interests now focus on academic controversies and biographical studies of historians generally (including G.R. Elton and George Rudé). In 2014 he co-edited (with Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter) a special issue of the *Journal of Historical Biography* on the theme "Telling Academic Lives." Doug's major publication is *The Ivory Tower and Beyond: Participant Historians of the Pacific* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009). His most recent book (co-edited with John G. Reid) is *Clio's Lives: Biographies and Autobiographies of Historians* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017).

Doug  
Munro





## Biography in Spain

*“Fresh contributions  
 and the re-examination  
 of controversial characters  
 have nurtured the  
 academic debate”*

**Roundtable Discussion**  
 September 20  
 14<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

**Panel**  
 September 21  
 10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>

Biography in Spain has faced challenges, many of them extraneous to the genre. Flourishing under European influence during the 1930s, it was abruptly halted by the Civil War. A lengthy dictatorship saw it hijacked to serve the heroic and hagiographic ethos of National-Catholicism. Democracy, when it arrived, demanded a collective protagonist and history from below and held biography in contempt. Nationalist projects, particularly in Catalonia, saw in it a tool for the (re)construction of cultural identity and cohesion.

Since the mid-1990s, biography has gradually become historiographically relevant, as witnessed by improvements in the quality and number of publications, the range of subjects and perspectives treated, and studies on its methodology and theory. Prizes, seminars, symposia and postgraduate courses on biography bespeak its growing presence in the cultural-academic world.

Fresh contributions and the re-examination of controversial characters have nurtured the academic debate, but the intelligibility of biography has also begun to attract both the general reader and the interest of publishers.

María Jesús González is a Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Cantabria, Spain and Senior Research Fellow at the *Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies* (LSE, London).

She is an expert in the political history of the reign of Alfonso XIII, she is author of *Ciudadanía y Acción: El conservadurismo maurista 1907–1923* (1990) and the political biography of the conservative statesman Antonio Maura: *El universo conservador de Antonio Maura: Biografía y proyecto de Estado* (1997), shortlisted for the Spanish National Essay Prize, 1998.

She has written the intellectual biography of *Raymond Carr, the British hispanist: Raymond Carr. La curiosidad del zorro. Una biografía*, (2010), shortlisted for the Spanish National Prize of History 2011. Translated into English as *Raymond Carr. The curiosity of the fox*, (2013), longlisted for the Elizabeth Longford Prize of Historical Biography, 2014.

Among other chapters or articles on biographies of politicians or intellectuals, she has recently co-edited a book about a Spanish historian: Gonzalez, M.J., Ugarte, J., *Juan Pablo Fusi. El historiador y su tiempo* (2016).

She now co-directs with prof. Anna Caballe an international research project on Biography: *Biographical Reason: Biography and Autobiographical narratives in the historical and literary research of XXth century Europe. Case studies and theoretical reflections*. (HAR2017-82500-P, Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness).

**María  
 Jesús  
 González**



## Writing Lives in Contemporary Italy

**Roundtable Discussion**  
September 20  
14<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

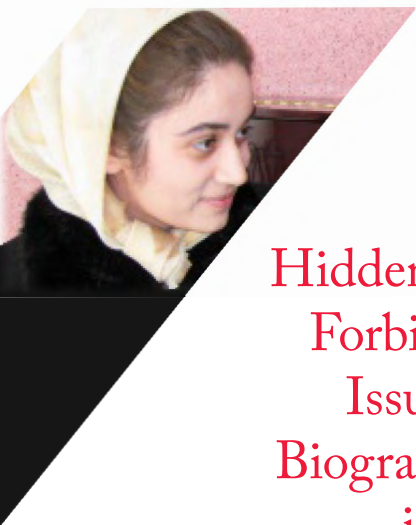
**Panel**  
September 21  
14<sup>30</sup> – 15<sup>30</sup>

This lecture intends to give an historical survey of the practice of biography in contemporary Italy. From the particular relationship between the biography and the nation building process – in other words “to make the Italians”, in the late 19th century and the early 20th century – to the different forms of telling lives in nowadays’ Italy. Yannick will also examine the different outlook of some great intellectuals and historians on biography (such as Benedetto Croce, Arnaldo Momigliano, Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi), and discuss the importance of the publishing firms and some editorial collections for the practice of biography, in order to understand several specific issues such as: national lives versus local ones; the selection of historical characters; the importance of the micro-history; the thriving boom of the biography in the 70s and 80s; the studies and current research on biography.

Yannick Gouchan is a Professor of Italian Literature and Culture at Aix-Marseille Université (France). He teaches at the Italian Studies Department and has been a researcher at the CAER (Center of Research in Romance Studies) since 2004. He is a member of the editorial board of the French review *Italies* and the Italian publishing house Stilo Editrice. His scholarship mainly concerns contemporary Italian literature, in particular poetry. He published many articles and essays on Giovanni Pascoli, Attilio Bertolucci, Vittorio Sereni, as well as Paolo Maccari, Salvatore Quasimodo and World War I Italian literature.

His last published works are about childhood in Italian poetry between the late 19th and early 20th centuries (*La figura del fanciullo nell’opera di D’Annunzio, di Pascoli e dei Crepuscolari*, Cisalpino, 2016, and *Enfances italiennes*, “*Italies*”, n. 21, PUP, 2017). As a member of the board of the Biography Society, he contributes with studies on the relationship between Poetry and Biography (*Giovanni Pascoli à l’épreuve de la biographie*, 2016 ; *Études biographiques. La biographie au carrefour des Humanités* and *Biography and Verity*, both directed with Joanny Moulin and Phuong Ngoc Nguyen, to be published by Champion in 2018 and 2019), and the Biography in the graphic novel (*La vie graphique d’Elizabeth Siddal*, 2018).

**Yannick  
Gouchan**



## Hidden and Forbidden Issues of Biographies in the Recognition of Various Societies

**Panel**  
**September 21**  
**10<sup>15</sup> – 11<sup>15</sup>**

Sahar argues that the “forbidden issues” of biographies can not only be used to explain the differences between various societies in the realms of culture, policy, religion and social life, but that they are also a suitable benchmark for investigating the process of created alterations in a society during different historical time periods.

Opposing views on controversial topics can be discussed freely in certain societies, but not in all of them. The forbidden issues, or the do’s and don’ts, can be imposed on societies either compulsorily or conventionally. Biographies are a suitable place for the manifestation of these controversies in various societies.

This lecture briefly investigates the governing cultural, religious and social topics in Iran from the Constitutional Revolution to the Islamic Revolution. Furthermore, it will specifically focus on the role and impact of censorship in the writing of biography in Iran.

Sahar has a BA in Mining Engineering (minors: extraction) from Sahand University of Technology (Iran) and an MA in Iranian languages (minors: Old Indo-Iranian languages) from Public University of Tabriz (Iran). She was selected as brilliant talent of Tabriz University from 2016 to 2018. She started her research on biography at the age of 16, focusing on Iranian cultural eminent persons. She published a book and several articles on internal and external publications; gave presentations in international symposiums held in Turkey and Tajikistan; cooperated as a researcher in Tajikistan oral history; and prepared and executed programs introducing some of Iranian prominent personalities for Radio Tehran.

Her works focus on the influence of eminent persons in cultural mutual relations between Iran and other countries (specifically Iran’s neighbors). Her research shows how Iranian notables had and have deep influences on the various cultural aspects of Turkey and Tajikistan. Sahar is very interested in the cultural and linguistic issues of biography. As an independent researcher, she tries to investigate the role of languages and translation in biography and the role of culture in the ruling policy of contemporary politicians.

**Sahar  
Vahdati  
Hosseinian**





## Some Considerations about Indonesian Biographies in the 20th Century

Roundtable Discussion  
September 20  
14<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

Panel  
September 21  
14<sup>30</sup> – 15<sup>30</sup>

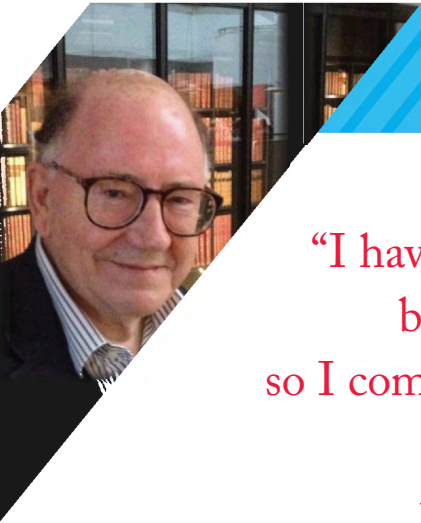
Indonesian biographies focus both on individual and collective identities, showing us a close relationship between the picture of the Individuals and the picture of the nation. Biographies of political figures (Sukarno, Soeharto, Tan Malaka), eminent artists (writers, singers, dancers, painters), religious figures and entrepreneurs deal with the whole nation. In considering Indonesian biographies, we must take account of the list of national heroes which aroused sets of official or popular biographies, sometimes intended for young readers. These works are often hagiographies. They take part in the nation-building, representing the Indonesian diversity (ethnic, religious) whom they are trying to defend.

We shall consider the biographies of three founding figures: Amir Hamzah, the first great poet of the Indonesian Modernity, considered as a link with the classical Malay tradition, Kartini, the pioneer of Indonesian feminism and Sukarno, the first President of the Republic. Sukarno proclaimed the Independence and conceived the political system, the Pancasila, that made possible to build the Indonesian nation, trying to reconcile the claims of Muslim and secular figures. Looking at change in picturing these three personalities should help us to better understand the relationship between the perceptions of these Individuals and the building of the Indonesian nation itself.

Holder of an “agrégation” and a PhD in philosophy, Étienne Naveau has also received a doctorate in Indonesian language, literature and civilization from the Inalco (the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations). The subject of his doctorate is *Indonesian autobiographical texts*. Since 2003, Étienne Naveau has been a lecturer in Indonesian language and literature at Inalco and a member of Cerlom (Center for Studies and Research on World Literatures and Orality). In November 2017, he attended his HDR with the title “Indonesian Identities and Foundational Discourses (Literature, Philosophy, Religions).”

Étienne Naveau teaches translation, history of Modern Indonesian literature and analysis of Indonesian religious and political discourses. He is also a translator of Indonesian literature. He translated an anthology of Indonesian sonnets (Paris, Pasar Malam, 2015), a bilingual anthology of poems by Taufiq Ismail (Jakarta, Horison, 2015), a bilingual booklet of Sufi poetry by Acep Zamzam Noor (Paris, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016), as well as two novels by Eka Kurniawan (Paris, Folio and Sabine Wespieser, 2017).

## Étienne Naveau



## The Biographer's Handshake

“I have been writing and teaching  
biography for over fifty years,  
so I come before you as an old-timer  
(or ancient mariner),  
whose hand may be shaking  
in more senses than one.”

In my time I have seen remarkable changes come over the form, not least its invasion by autobiography, the memoir, the selfie and the internet. In response I would like to look at my own changing research and teaching methods, and my emerging idea of “the handshake” across different generations, cultures, disciplines, and genders. To do this I will glance back at the British national tradition of liberal biography that has inspired me, and explore the key but deeply problematic notions of empathy and advocacy which all biographers everywhere have to confront. I will risk by ending with my notorious “Ten Commandments for Biographers”.

**Keynote Lecture**  
**September 20**  
**16<sup>00</sup> – 17<sup>00</sup>**

Richard Holmes was the first Professor of Biographical Studies at the University of East Anglia, 2001-2007. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, and an Honorary Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge. He is the author of *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, and biographies of Shelley, Coleridge and young Dr Johnson. His study of scientists and poets *The Age of Wonder* won the Royal Society Prize for Science Books (UK) and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction (USA). He has also written about the early balloonists in *Falling Upwards*, which was one of *Time* magazine's Top Ten Non-Fiction Books of 2013. His most recent book is *This Long Pursuit*, a study of his biographical methods and teaching. In 2018 he won the international BIO Award (USA) for sustained achievement in Biography.

**Richard  
Holmes**



## Interview with Nigel Hamilton

## Not Winston Churchill, but US President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the military genius of World War Two, claims Nigel Hamilton.

The praised American biographer obtained his doctoral degree at the University of Groningen's Biography Institute in 2016, for a biography about FDR's role as military strategist.

### Biography as a corrective

In his dissertation, Hamilton focuses specifically on the year 1943, a year Roosevelt's biographers have ignored until now. Hamilton's original idea was to portray FDR as a "commander in chief." In over seventy years of scholarship, no historian has ever studied FDR as a military strategist. In the epilogue to his dissertation, Hamilton pleads for a "biography as corrective." Why do biographies need to correct history?

Hamilton: "The problem with historians is that they search for patterns in history, almost as if they were statisticians. They do not study events at a microscopic scale. Biographers, however, study a specific person in detail. They do not do so to map out a personality, but rather to answer the question how that person influenced the world around him. Historians scratch the surface, while biographers conduct forensic research like a detective."

Masterclass  
September 19  
12<sup>30</sup> – 16<sup>00</sup>

Opening Lecture  
September 19  
16<sup>30</sup> – 17<sup>30</sup>

### World order

Hamilton claims that Churchill was only interested in winning the war, while Roosevelt was thinking ahead, envisioning a world after the war. "He wanted to construct the United Nations, including a safety council that united the great world powers. He was a visionary in that respect." In 1945, while he was preparing a speech aimed at setting up the United Nations, Roosevelt died. In the United Nations, world powers were united politically and economically. Over the course of the seventy years after World War Two, a new, united world order emerged, just like FDR imagined. "Roosevelt saw America as the glue that held the world together, and it has been like that for the past seventy years."

### Donald Trump

According to Hamilton, the presidency of Donald Trump might threaten that unity. "I am worried this world order might not survive Trump. He is not especially interested in anything but holding his own business empire together." Hamilton believes America's power will wane because of Trump, and China will take over in military and economic terms. He

admits this process has been going on for a while now, but "Trump represents the worst of America, something other than his selfish self. A cultural crisis, one in which America fails to adjust to the challenges of a changing world."

If America is no longer the glue that holds the modern world order together, could the rise of a new world order be a possibility? Could this lead to a clash between the existing world powers? "I do not believe the US will declare war on Russia or China, but smaller conflicts, such as the one between America and North Korea, might escalate. That is how the First World War started."

### Groningen

Hamilton had already written 27 books before he received his doctoral degree at age 72. He longed for professional feedback on his work, which he received from Hans Renders. "I thought it was amazing to do my dissertation in Groningen, also because of Doeko Bosscher's involvement. The city is great, and the Biography Institute is renowned. The only part I did not like, was the dissertation's defense. When I finally heard 'hora est,' I felt happier than I had been in ages."





## Interview with John A. Farrell

*What was your first encounter with biography?*

My mother was a great history buff - especially the history of our Revolutionary War. When my dad went off on business trips, she would pack us in the car and head for Lexington and Concord, or Williamsburg or Yorktown. And there was, during my childhood, a series of "Landmark"

*"I have played no major role in biography's success in the United States."*

books for young readers, published by Random House, available in our grade school library. As a newspaperman, I made something of a name for myself by writing long, long pieces - investigative

work and political feature stories - that often took the form of profiles. And so, in 1995, when I wanted to stretch my skills even further, biography was a natural way to go.

*Why is it such a successful genre in the US? What role did you play in this success?*

It is not false modesty to report that I have played no major role in biography's success in the United States. It has always been popular: a tradition that goes back to the disciples of the Founding Fathers, who collected their letters and published hagiographic accounts of their lives. There were major contributions made by accomplished writers

*"the Dutch have a keen recognition of human frailty"*

who lacked advanced degrees. This trend has continued as biographers like Robert Caro, David McCullough, Ron Chernow, Stacy Schiff and Walter Isaacson now command the best-seller lists. For popular audiences, it is a fine way to study history.

*In what way did your latest Nixon biography contribute to the many biographies of him that already existed?*

There were indeed many Nixon books chronicling the triumphs and disasters of his presidency - and a flurry of biographies published around the time of his death in 1994. But when I began this project, seven years ago, there was no comprehensive single-volume life of Nixon that included the torrent of rich new material that has emerged since 1994. One fresh source for re-

search - Nixon's political files - were not opened until 2007, and yielded particularly revealing evidence from the 1968 campaign, including his attempts to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson's eleventh-hour initiative to bring an end to the Vietnam War on the eve of the election.

*Can you tell us something more about your relationship with the Netherlands?*

My wife - Catharina Anspach - was born to and raised by Dutch parents. They emigrated to North America - first to Canada and then to the United States - seeking economic opportunity in the years after World War II. Though best known in the USA for their resilience, the Dutch have a keen recognition of human frailty, which is reflected in a delightful sense of humor and a laudable commitment to social justice.

**Roundtable  
Discussion  
September 20  
14<sup>30</sup> - 16<sup>00</sup>**



## Life, Love and Death The New ABC of Biography

Nigel  
Hamilton  
&  
Hans  
Renders

In *The New ABC of Biography* – an ABC of the genre, with 26 entries – two biographers and teachers take us on a tour, from A for Authorization (a very misunderstood concept, in the authors' view) to Z for Zigzag to the End. In trenchant, witty entries they explore the good, the bad and the plain ugly in modern "life writing" and the portrayal of real lives today – and how, across history and continents, we got here.

Highly original and compellingly written, *The New ABC of Biography* is both authoritative and provocative. It will fascinate general readers interested in how real lives are approached by biographers today in a multitude of media – and how, historically, we got here. It will make a much-needed contribution in academia, where the theory of biography is a burgeoning field of inquiry, as well as providing an important text for students of history, language and literature, the arts, American and gender studies, science and media. And, not least, for biographers trying to avoid the pitfalls of ignorance or ineptitude.

Amsterdam University Press

### Colofon

This conference was organized by the **Biography Institute**,  
**The Biography Society** and the **Biographers International Organization**  
Prof. Hans Renders (University of Groningen)  
Prof. Joanny Moulin (Université Aix-Marseille)

### Scientific Committee

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Prof. Elsbeth Etty, VU University Amsterdam  
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