

A long, winding path of glowing paper lanterns in a dark field at night. The lanterns are made of a textured, light-colored paper and are illuminated from within, creating a warm, golden glow. They are arranged in a line that curves away into the distance, leading the eye towards the top right of the frame. The background is a dark, textured field, possibly grass or reeds, which makes the bright lanterns stand out prominently.

HARDY  
HORÁKOVÁ  
KAYLOR  
&  
PRAJZNEROVÁ

ALTERNATIVES  
IN  
BIOGRAPHY

WRITING LIVES  
IN  
DIVERSE  
ENGLISH - LANGUAGE  
CONTEXTS



# ALTERNATIVES IN BIOGRAPHY

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ALTERNATIVES  
IN  
BIOGRAPHY

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WRITING LIVES IN DIVERSE  
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CONTEXTS

Stephen Hardy

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&

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MASARYK UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Alternatives in Biography: Writing Lives in Diverse English-Language Contexts*, by Stephen Hardy, Martina Horáková, Michael Matthew Kaylor, and Kateřina Prajznerová

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# Preface

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Charles Darwin  
Concluding sentence of *The Origin of Species* (1859)

The present volume originated from an assumption that proved true in only a limited fashion: that, especially after the seminal experiments of the Bloomsbury circle and others—such as Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians*, T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*, and A. J. A. Symons’s *Quest for Corvo*—auto/biographical writing in English-speaking countries underwent a series of changes that corresponded to certain Modernist and Post-modernist tendencies, as well as to socio-political, economic, publishing, and other contexts and pressures. We, the present authors, assumed that those tendencies, contexts, and pressures led to “alternatives in biography,” alternatives that, more often than not, involved a conscious employment of the full range of techniques expected from authors of fiction. Further, that by examining diverse auto/biographical specimens arising from those changes, we would discover within them a range of common features, similar ways of being in the world, predictable tendencies, and shared techniques. We anticipated that this would serve to situate the auto/biographies we were examining within a common ancestry, as offshoots of a family tree that had its roots in the established tradition of auto/biographical writing within the Western context. Bolstered by a research grant from the Czech Science Foundation, the four of us each collected representative specimens within our own areas of expertise, sorted and polished the auto/biographical remains at our disposal, assembled the panoply of residual bones, added flesh and trappings to provide that last realistic touch, then placed our specimens in cases, for public display. The result was one that Darwin would have anticipated, appreciated, and approved, but one that we did not anticipate: four utterly disparate chapters, a veritable museum devoted to auto/biographical diversity, to all those “endless forms” by which a range of auto/biographers have, through evolving metaphorical fins or wings or feet, swum or flown or pranced about, displaying unique potentialities for living and for capturing lives on the page. We decided simply to herald this diversity, to let the individual areas of our “natural history museum” remain distinct, rather than reworking, for purely scholarly purposes, our auto/biographical specimens into things they never were—associating the body of one with the wings of another, and the head of yet another. We realized, after attempting to do so on numerous occasions, that the result would have been little more than a collec-

tion of griffins or other composite fictional beasts such as one finds in a medieval bestiary.

Some of this arose from diversities of our own. “Living between the Lines,” the research grant mentioned above, allowed the four of us to exploit our shared interest in auto/biographical writings and issues, despite the fact that we are specialists in different areas (American, Australian, British, and Irish literatures and cultures) and have different scholarly concerns (environmental, gay, Indigenous, and philosophical). For the three years of the grant, we pooled our resources, intellectual and otherwise, which led, in regard to this topic, to an international conference, to two special issues of the journal *Brno Studies in English*, to an anthology of Czech translations, as well as to the present volume, which is divided in the following ways:

In Chapter I, “Versions of Pastoral Biography: Ackroyd, Carter, Berger,” writing which intersects with more conventional notions of the biographical from three rather different perspectives is reconsidered in terms of the pastoral, where pastoral is understood both in its poetic sense and in its more spiritual-ethical conception, concerned with both care for the land and for the community and its members. The first section focuses on the small fictional interludes inserted into the main body of Peter Ackroyd’s *Dickens* and their spiritual-fictional and, in this sense, pastoral significance. The second section looks at Paul Carter’s analysis of the life and death of the founder of Adelaide, William Light, connecting his dying to his relationship with the land, sea, air, and light of Australia, combining a poetics of the land with a political critique of biography as a form of memorialisation collaborative with imperial motives. The final section provides a reading of John Berger’s *A Fortunate Man*, a study of a general practitioner working in a community based in a relatively remote part of rural England.

In Chapter II, “Indigenous Collaborative Life Writing: Narrative Transgression in *Auntie Rita* and *Kayang & Me*,” such writing is revealed to possess a set of complex issues that involve textualizing the dynamic relationship between two narrative voices—the first, of the elder family member who is telling their life story; the second, a family member a generation younger who frames the telling by providing an accompanying commentary, by inserting fragments of their own lives and other materials. The two examined narratives from Australia, namely *Auntie Rita* by Rita and Jackie Huggins, and *Kayang & Me* by Kim Scott and Hazel Brown, are shown to represent a particular kind of Indigenous inter-generational collaborative life writing which inscribes a “dual voice.” The effect of this narrative stratagem is a *mélange* of voices from the past and present, voices enhanced by extracts from archival materials, paratexts, photos, and other important memorabilia: this *mélange* intentionally disrupts the official narrative of Australian nation-building.

In Chapter III, “Uranian Autobiography: Newman’s *Rondeaux of Boyhood* and Reid’s *Apostate*,” the first portion provides an overview of eleven strategies by which the “Uranians”—a cluster of pederasts writing during the Victorian and Edwardian periods—revealed, and sometimes even made capital on, their own autobiographical details, in defiance of obvious socio-political, religious, and other barriers. The second portion turns to two representative, yet innovative, Uranian “alternative autobiographies,” *Rondeaux of Boyhood* by A. Newman and *Apostate* by Forrest Reid. The former is a sequence of poems that is revealed to chronicle, in a strikingly autobiographical way, the development of Newman’s intimate relationship with thirteen-year-old Norman, with the themes and dynamics of this relationship surfacing progressively, without an overarching aesthetic ordering, which makes the slender volume an au-

thentic, chronological account of six years of their lives. The latter, Reid's literary portrait of himself during his boyhood and adolescence, is here shown to be unique enough (and not just among Uranian "alternative autobiographies") to warrant a coinage to capture that uniqueness—"fictionate autobiography."

In Chapter IV, "Bioregional Biography: The Landscapes of the Lives of Emily Carr and Emma Bell Miles," this form of biography is portrayed as bringing into the foreground the interplay of self, place, and narrative. A comparison of Emily Carr's personal nonfictions about the Cascadian bioregion of Victoria, British Columbia, and Emma Bell Miles's about the Appalachian bioregion of Walden's Ridge, Tennessee, suggests that these two contemporaries relate to place in strikingly similar ways. To illustrate this, the chapter provides a "dual walking tour" of selected sites with special resonance for Carr and Miles, which serves to interweave together the landscapes of their lives and locales, of their internal and external worlds. As the chapter shows, in each of their personal nonfictions the lives of the self and the place become a single story, as if inscribing each other into a relief map.

Amidst the process of constructing this volume, we came to appreciate that, for the most part, the auto/biographical works we chose to explore reflect less of an intentional break from, or adjustment of, the more established canons of Western auto/biographical writing than we had anticipated at the outset. Like the varied species and the evolutionary processes chronicled in Darwin's works, the range of auto/biographers who appear within these covers readily and unapologetically embraced whatever stratagems, themes, content, orderings, or styles best suited their own self-actualization, expression, survival—and auto/biographical writing is, perhaps more so than any other literary or scholarly genre, an attempt to secure survival, the perpetuation of a person or group of persons or oneself, despite the oblivion that often accompanies changes in time and environment, be those changes physical or cultural. Whether this involves, in the face of modern homogenizing capitalism and other forces that have no respect for history, tradition, or rural life, the preserving of pastoral values and spaces; whether this involves, under colonial and other pressures, the preserving of Indigenous cultures and their lush networks of personal connections and cultural resonances; whether this involves, in a society where such a love is dubbed too criminal even to refer to, the preserving of pederastic culture and its attendant dynamics and artefacts; whether this involves, in a world of spreading urbanization, the preserving of memory and spaces, regions of internal and external nature that some insightfully hold to be vital for a life well-lived—auto/biography is, as we came to appreciate with vigour, ever a struggle for survival and a struggle to give voice to that struggle.

Seen in this way, to have drawn elaborate scholarly connections tracing lines of evolution and descent from Rousseau's *Confessions* to the life of Berger's country doctor, or from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to collaborative Indigenous life writings, or from Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* to coded Uranian texts, or from Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* to Carr's account of her authentic interactions with her beloved Cascadia, would, at best, have been tangential, speculative, disingenuous, or likely just plain wrong. For that reason we chose instead to highlight that the auto/biographical works examined in the present volume arose within idiosyncratic conditions and incomparable social and cultural constraints, express very distinct motives, and reveal very different precedents and influences. Nonetheless, they display, when considered

## PREFACE

as a collective, the intriguing ways in which auto/biography adapts and flourishes, taking “endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful.”

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Brno  
*December* 18, 2011

# CHAPTER I

## VERSIONS OF PASTORAL BIOGRAPHY



# Chapter I

## VERSIONS OF PASTORAL BIOGRAPHY: Ackroyd, Carter, Berger

By Stephen Hardy

“Get a life.”

Closing comment of the film *Sliver* (1993)<sup>1</sup>

BIOGRAPHY and pastoral both constitute broad generic categorizations which are open to a constantly changing and developing variety of interpretations with regard to their precise nature and boundaries. This chapter primarily concerns itself with an analysis of parts of the work of three English-born writers, Peter Ackroyd (*b.* 1949), Paul Carter (*b.* 1951) and John Berger (*b.* 1926), and ways in which they provide instances of combining elements of biography and pastoral, while also challenging what might be considered as the boundaries of their conventional characterization. The commentary and analysis provided here are intended as initially suggestive rather than potentially definitive and do not therefore incorporate any theoretical overview of either genre. The prefatory remarks on biography and pastoral are provided as a form of contextualization which is intended to be of immediate relevance to what follows. No previous acquaintance is presumed on the part of the reader with the three writers in question. A short introductory sketch of the nature of their work will therefore be in order before embarking upon a more detailed exploration of those aspects relevant to the brief series of partly explicative and partly interpretive commentaries presented here.

Peter Ackroyd has, to date, produced a series of relatively conventional, mostly literary biographies, including those of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), William Blake (1757-1827), Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), and William Shakespeare (1564-1616). These works, it can be argued, form part of a broader project, theoretically adumbrated in an earlier essay on the shortcomings and demoralisation of contemporary British culture, which also includes, in addition to the biographies, a series of novels partly characterized by markedly biographical elements in terms of the central part played in them by actual historical figures. Among these are Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Nicholas Hawksmoor (ca. 1661-1736), Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), and John Milton (1608-1674), as well as a great many other individuals

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<sup>1</sup> From the film *Sliver* (1993), directed by Phillip Noyce and distributed by Paramount Pictures.

prominent in the history of English literature and culture. The tendency in Ackroyd's work is to weave an accumulative tapestry of interconnected historical figures, spiritually re-invigorated by a form of neo-gothic dramatization and supplemented by scholarly investigation that reconnects past and present through a blurring and interrogation of many of the lines customarily drawn between them. In the analysis presented here, the focus will be on the more unconventional elements included in his biography of Dickens.

The work of Paul Carter, a cultural geographer and historian born in Berkshire and educated in Oxford, but who has lived for the last few decades in Australia, constitutes a substantially different but, in certain respects, comparable form of project. In Carter's work, the focus is on a poetics of movement initially projected into a critical analysis of the colonization of Australia but including an examination of historically prior forms of subjectivity which close in upon themselves in ways which exclude sympathetic attention to the environment upon whose territory they invasively encroach. Like Ackroyd, Carter reads history from a perspective informed by a specific aesthetic but one which pays more attention to relations between created form and natural environment, rather than the creative word and spiritual belief. While his approach is not primarily biographical, it includes substantial studies of aspects of the lives of significantly representative figures in the physical and cultural context of both Australian and European geographies. One of these figures, William Light (1786-1839), is the subject of the third major study in Carter's book *The Lie of the Land* (1996) and will be the subject of the analysis provided here.<sup>1</sup>

John Berger, the third and final writer to be discussed, has developed a substantially different kind of project, moving from his earlier considerations of the significance of painting to a later phase, aspects of which will be analysed in this chapter. This later phase begins with documentary studies of intellectuals whose lives are involved with those of others in highly practical professional forms, notably the medical practitioner John Eskell ("John Sassall"), in *A Fortunate Man* (1967). It moves on, in *A Seventh Man* (1975) to an examination of the plight of migrant workers excluded from developing and articulating a meaningful sense of their own lives and, from the perspective of the study presented here, culminates, in the *Into Their Labours* trilogy (1979-1990),<sup>2</sup> in a partly fictional presentation of the lives of a very large section of the world's population, the peasantry, whose way of life would seem to be threatened, for the first time in its history, with probable extinction. Berger's project takes the form both of more obviously documentary studies but also, in his later work, "fictional" writing which indicates a close relation to existing, "factual" conditions. In all cases, the perspective presented is openly and unapologetically Marxist in orientation. Each of these studies, it will be argued, can be seen as a significant form of biography in their own right as well as providing, particularly in the later trilogy, a radical form of pastoral grounded in the everyday life and historical experience of the peasantry.

The order of analysis chosen here is not intended simply as a representative "ABC" or as a chronologically arranged itinerary. I begin with Ackroyd as someone who practises the writing of biography in the sense of the term which is generally accepted, even if the focus provided is upon aspects of his divergence from the conven-

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> The following books are by John Berger: *A Fortunate Man* (Cambridge: Granta Books, 1989 [1967]); *A Seventh Man* (Cambridge: Granta Books, 1989 [1975]); *Pig Earth* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1979]); *Once in Europa* (London: Granta Books, 1990 [1989]); and *Lilac and Flag* (London: Granta Books, 1990).



tional and his interest, in *Dickens* (1990), in muddying the clarity of the boundary between factual and fictional biography.<sup>1</sup> Paul Carter, while primarily a cultural geographer and historian, does involve himself in the production of lengthy and searching biographical sketches and, in the study considered in the present context, a partial interrogation of the biographies of colonial founding fathers. John Berger, as both essayist and novelist, has never produced a conventional biography of any kind,<sup>2</sup> thus situating himself, for the purposes of this study, at the furthest point from the conventional, but his documentary studies and the fictional work considered here are indicative of productive forms of deviation from what might be regarded as conventional norms. The trajectory of this chapter also affords a form of journey from one end of the political spectrum to the other—from Ackroyd’s delicate shades of blue, through Carter’s substantially green post-colonial perspective, to Berger’s profounder shades of red, although this is rather more by chance than by design. The work of each of these three writers also expresses, it will be contended, a version of pastoral, different in kind, but related when viewed from this generic perspective. As stated earlier, while no attempt is made here to construct a substantial theoretical framework for the analysis offered, a few brief introductory comments on some of the ways in which the concerns of pastoral and biography might be seen as overlapping can usefully serve as prelude to a more detailed examination of the texts to be considered.

The notion of pastoral might be seen, in some respects, as even older than that of biography but both are closely intertwined in their beginnings. Catherine N. Parke, in her book *Biography: Writing Lives* (2002), traces the beginnings of biography to the earliest commemorative inscriptions of the third millennium BCE.<sup>3</sup> These are public testaments to the power of officially celebrated rulers and might be contrasted with the significance of those small, hitherto virtually unremembered, lives that William Wordsworth (1770-1850) attempted, in his poetry, to invest with a specific and relatively radical form of pastoral significance, often inspired both by the living and by the headstones in the graveyards he frequented in order to ponder upon the epitaphs presented there. Commenting on the way in which Wordsworth “countered magnificently” Samuel Johnson’s observation that epitaphs lacked discrimination with regard to the particular character of the individual, Philip Davis, in his *Memory and Writing* (1983),<sup>4</sup> considers how Wordsworth’s remarks and traces of his considerations, as in “a violet by a mossy stone,” in perhaps the most memorable of all the “Lucy” poems, mark “that minimal difference between something and nothing which is the very principle of life itself.”<sup>5</sup> In the introduction to his book dealing with a range of writing produced between the early and the first third of the twentieth century, Davis notes that “The works with which I am mainly concerned in what follows are those which, in complicated ways, derive from an autobiographical impulse often not choosing to express itself directly in conventional autobiography.”<sup>6</sup> The line between an actual life and the memory or recording of that life, in whatever form, can, in certain senses, be almost as complex and various a process as that of life itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Minerva, 1993 [1990]).

<sup>2</sup> His *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (New York: Vintage, 1989 [1965]) is discussed in a later study of mine, *Implicating Environments*, which has yet to be published.

<sup>3</sup> See Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives (Genre in Context)* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xxi.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, *Memory and Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1983), p. 7. The reference is to William Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, in 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), II, pp. 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, *Memory and Writing*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

In the opening chapter of the study previously referred to, Catherine Parke provides a helpful overview of the genre which draws attention to the significance accorded to personal acquaintance with the person whose life is to be studied and remembered, the problematic nature of such acquaintance and how it is treated, as well as the equally, and in some respects even greater, problem of writing the life of an individual with whom one has had no actual personal contact.<sup>1</sup> Much early biography, it might be suggested, tends to be either of a glorifying or hagiographical nature or tendentiously negative in kind. Modern biographers (and Parke observes that the terms “biography” and “biographer” do not make an appearance in English until the mid-seventeenth century), like their ancient counterparts in many respects, are faced with a task which is at least double: how to record a faithful history and how to effectively convey the nature of who, or what, the person really was or can be claimed to ultimately represent.<sup>2</sup>

Like Parke, William C. Dowling, in *The Boswellian Hero* (1979), is concerned with the inevitably literary aspect of almost any form of biography.<sup>3</sup> In Dowling’s reading, Boswell is almost inevitably as much an artist as a historian; no tape-recorders were available, so whatever conversation James Boswell (1740-1795) had with Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was inevitably recollected, even if it was at the ending of the day on which it took place—and should he have been an adept stenographer, would it have been a “real” conversation if Boswell took notes while he was involved in conducting it? Such considerations, as with any form of historical account, in some sense, compromise or complicate the attempt to provide an objectively faithful account of lives, events, and their historical context.<sup>4</sup>

One question which neither of these authors directly addresses (and, in terms of their own concerns, there is no particular reason why they should) is that biography or “life writing” might also be considered to be writing about not only a human life but about life in other senses, a category which in at least one sense includes everything ever written. The relevance of this question to the present discussion plays some part in the “pastoral” element in this chapter’s title; the pre-modifying adjective connects to a substantial amount of writing covered by a more traditional reading of the substantive. Whether the notion of pastoral is older than that of biography might be considered as much a matter of pedantic etymology as serious cultural research, but for the purposes of this study one can observe that a helpful starting point can be provisionally located, in the context of western European culture, in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (composed sometime between 750 and 650 BCE) which, among other things, provides its own, culturally specific version of how the earth came into being, how things got complicated pretty quickly, and what we should and shouldn’t do if we want to live a happy, worthwhile life. To partly invoke the name of a more recent writer, in the German philosophical tradition, with marked, if politically catastrophic, pastoral leanings, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), pastoral literature, biographical or otherwise, would seem to have much to do with “care,” of one kind or another—for individuals, communities and the varied and various environments in which they are situated. The present chapter will move from consideration of a writer whose concerns can be viewed as pastoral in a more religious or theological sense, while also

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<sup>1</sup> See Parke, *Biography*, pp. 1-34.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> William C. Dowling, *The Boswellian Hero* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xiii.

productively interrogating the boundaries between fact and fiction, to another whose preoccupations are with relations between colonialism, environment and a poetics of movement, and finally to a third who engages with a more directly political reading of the significance of the life both of a significant individual and of communities, focusing on the life of those forms of community which are still rurally based, though often negatively implicated in a developing metropolitan context. Only the first of these writers produces biographies in the full and more traditional sense of the term but the latter two include substantially biographical perspectives in their approach to relations between human life and both its immediate natural and broader social environments in a fashion which is as much factual as it is fictional.

### PETER ACKROYD: DIVINING *DICKENS*

Who is / Frank Moore?<sup>1</sup>

“I Never Saw Him Again.”

...

I Never Saw Him Again.<sup>2</sup>

The first writer to be considered, Peter Ackroyd, is the author of several biographies, a stream of novels and, increasingly, a number of cultural histories, in addition to a substantial body of literary reviews and one early work of literary-theoretical polemic. Many of these writings, both biographical and fictional, concern themselves with historical individuals, but almost all of them also focus on one place above all, namely London, and another of some significance, England. The two, or if one includes the historical individuals, the three, seem to merge into one, often mysterious, shadowy realm, over which its guardian, the caring author, seems to hold a certain influence, as he leads us into his labyrinth, somewhat in the fashion of a Virgil fastidiously guiding the bewildered reader-as-Dante through the deepest reaches of Hell and slowly upward into the higher regions of salvation.

This intended comparison with Dante is offered in a partly but not entirely facetious vein. Ackroyd's project can be viewed as part of an English tradition of Catholic writing under a Protestant political dispensation which stretches back at least to the time of Thomas More, the subject of one of Ackroyd's later biographies,<sup>3</sup> and which in the twentieth-century context might be considered as including writers such as G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966), J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973), C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), and numerous others. If one returns not merely to the beginning of the twentieth century but a little further into the middle and later years of the nineteenth, amongst these writers one might also include a partly gothic, partly neo-classical and homoerotic strain, the latter encompassing the work of Walter Pater

<sup>1</sup> “The Librarian,” lines 72-73, in *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 412-414.

<sup>2</sup> Ackroyd, *Dickens*, pp. 1118 and 1120.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998).

(1839-1894), G. M. Hopkins (1844-1889), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), the autobiographical narrator of Ackroyd's second novel, and F. W. Rolfe, "Baron Corvo" (1860-1913), author of *Hadrian VII* (1907) and subject of A. J. A. Symons's extraordinary biographical study *The Quest for Corvo* (1934).<sup>1</sup> With the last mentioned writers one begins to be involved with a conceptualisation of fictionate autobiography<sup>2</sup> that partly involves a conscious interrogation of notions of what constitutes the factual, and a consequent blurring of its relation to the fictional; immediate precedents for later biographical approaches can be found in works such as Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918),<sup>3</sup> which can be seen as consciously questioning more traditionally respectful and, in some respects, more imperialist versions of biography and history.

The "pastoral" element in Ackroyd's work thus includes, it will be argued, a substantial religious element, one partly concerned with returning England to the Catholic fold, though in a fashion and modality which can perhaps be characterized as being as much catholic as Roman Catholic in its related concerns with England's overall literary and cultural heritage. At the same time, Ackroyd's concern with place and the significance of everyday life and ordinary people, as well as a particular, and highly urban location, London, situates him in a tradition which takes us back at least to Hesiod but also indicates the immediate influence of one strand of literary modernism on his work. In this relatively brief analysis of a small element of his *oeuvre* the aim will be to focus upon a particular aspect of one of Ackroyd's biographies, *Dickens*, in order to indicate how it sheds light upon Ackroyd's work as a whole and the nature of some of his literary strategies and cultural attitudes. Rather than beginning with his fiction or biographies, a pertinent start can be made with a more theoretical study written at an early stage in his literary career, *Notes for a New Culture* (1976),<sup>4</sup> which will help in part to contextualize the nature of his subsequent work.

In *Notes for a New Culture* Ackroyd positions himself in relation to elements within both modern and modernist literature. The designation "modern" is intended to indicate the nature of developments in the history of literature from the time of the early to middle seventeenth century and their eventual critical interrogation by, in Ackroyd's reading, writers working from the middle of the nineteenth century, particularly in the French context, up to the time of the onset of post-structuralism, so-called. It is important to note that in this consciously polemical study Ackroyd is as much concerned with the cultural politics as with any more traditionally spiritual aspects of what he chooses to term a "dispirited nation,"<sup>5</sup> although that characterisation would also seem to refer to questions of religion and of national morale as much as to strictly literary and cultural matters. The book was published three years prior to *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979),<sup>6</sup> written by Colin McCabe, the non-renewal of whose contract provoked the so-called "Cambridge English Crisis" and the British version of the theory wars, played out in a somewhat different fashion in the United States where Ackroyd, on a Mellon Fellowship, had probably developed many of the perspectives included in his literary-cultural polemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Rolfe, Baron Corvo, *Hadrian the Seventh* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914). A. J. A. Symons, *The Quest for Corvo: An Experiment in Biography* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001 [1934]).

<sup>2</sup> Regarding "fictionate autobiography," see pp. 221-237 of the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1918]).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Notes for a New Culture* (Portchester: Alikin Books, 1993 [1976]).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> Colin McCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (London: Macmillan, 1979).