

## MA IN LIFE-WRITING

Autumn 2008

Tutor: Professor Kathryn Hughes

### LITEMO15 BIOGRAPHY

This module, compulsory for students on the MA in Life Writing, explores the history and controversies of Biography, from Plutarch to Holroyd by way of Boswell and Strachey. In the process we will discuss ideas of cultural myth, human empathy and identity and notions of celebrity. We will ask how men's and women's life-stories have been differently shaped, narrated and interpreted. We will also look at that particularly British phenomenon, the professional biographer, and explore why and how his/her work may vary from that produced by scholars working from within the academy.

Students will be encouraged to find their own special subjects, to study comparative biography, and to look at experimentation beginning with Virginia Woolf where fact and fiction, 'granite and rainbow' meet. Seminar work may include presenting the case for a favourite modern biography (and how it might be improved); introducing an historical topic from notes (eg Romantic rebels, Victorian heroines, Bloomsbury sceptics). Crucially, you will be asked to keep abreast of new biographical work and its critical reception. Finally you will write a 5,000 word essay, in preparation for a supervised dissertation in the Summer.

#### Indicative Reading

This list is not final, but gives an idea of the texts you are likely to encounter on the module.

Plutarch, *Roman Lives*, (see especially 'Caesar', 'Mark Antony' and 'Brutus'), (Oxford World Classics).

John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, (Penguin Classics).

Samuel Johnson, *Life of Richard Savage*, (in Johnson, *Selected Writings*, Penguin, or Harper Perennial, part of the *Classic Biographies* series ed. Richard Holmes – the title of this edition is *Johnson on Savage*).

James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, (abridged edition, Penguin)

William Godwin, *Memoir of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (Penguin, under Wollstonecraft or the Harper Perennial edition, ed. Richard Holmes, *Godwin on Wollstonecraft*).

Elizabeth Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Bronte*, (Penguin)

Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, (Penguin)

Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, (Penguin)

Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, (Oxford Classics)  
Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*, (Picador).

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