



Universiteit Utrecht

# The Biographer and the Translator

TRANSLATING LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

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Research: 3160 words  
Source Text: 2284 words  
Translation: 2511 words  
Annotations: 463 words

## Abstract:

This thesis analyzes the various styles operating in the genre of literary biography by analyzing and translating *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath & Ted Hughes* by Janet Malcolm as the source text. The main research question of this thesis is: How can the translator adequately capture the individual styles of both the literary biography's author and the biography's subject matter? This question is answered by using secondary literature on translation theory within the field of informative and literary texts, particularly biographies. James Knowlson's *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* and its translation by Martine Vosmaer and Karina van Santen (*Tot roem gedoemd: Het leven van Samuel Beckett*) are used as parallel texts that will inform this investigation.

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## Introduction

Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes have long been a much-discussed literary couple. They gained controversial worldwide renown after Plath committed suicide in 1963, by using a gas oven after sealing the kitchen with towels and clothes and leaving her two young children in the upstairs bedroom with some milk and sandwiches. At that time, Hughes and Plath had been separated for six months after Hughes started an affair with another woman. Since Plath's untimely death, numerous biographies have been dedicated to the couple and the poets individually, such as *Bitter Fame* (1989) by Anne Stevenson (a biography of Sylvia Plath); *The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath* (1991) by Ronald Hayman; *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (2015) by Jonathan Bate; and *Her Husband: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (2004) by Diane Middlebrook.

An interesting and slightly different biography is *The Silent Woman* by Janet Malcolm, first published in 1993 in the United States and in 1994 in the United Kingdom, in which Malcolm establishes a reasoned study into the nature of biography and “examines the various accounts of Plath's life [to] discover how Plath became an enigma in literary history” (Malcolm N. p.). To be able to do this, Malcolm spoke with people who had written biographies on Hughes and Plath and also met with Olwyn Hughes, Ted Hughes's sister and the former literary agent to the Plath estate. In addition, she lists and examines a number of critical statements on biography as a genre, for instance how “biography is the medium through which the remaining secrets of the famous dead are taken from them and dumped out in full view of the world” (Malcolm 8-9) and she explains that this transgressive nature of biography is rarely acknowledged while it is also an explanation for the genre's popularity (Malcolm 9).

Despite the popularity of the biographical genre, there are no Dutch biographies of Plath or Hughes nor of the two of them as a couple. Connie Palmen's *Jij zegt het* (2016) is biographical fiction rather than a biography. René Kurpershoek's translation of Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* (*De glazen stolp*, 2014) has also been marketed as novel rather than a(n) (auto)biography, and will therefore not be used for this research. Only *Ik wil nooit vergeven worden* (2012), which contains translations of letters of Hughes and *De dagboeken 1950-1962* (2005), Plath's translated diaries, are available in Dutch. Plath's and Hughes' places in the canon of contemporary Anglo-American literature, however, have by now been firmly established, and to date their lives remain much-discussed topics<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore my contention that a Dutch translation of a critical study of Hughes and Plath is called for, so as to introduce a wider audience in the Netherlands and Belgium to their lives and works. Janet Malcolm's *The Silent Woman*, even if it was originally published in 1993 and new material has come to light since, offers a thoroughly researched critical introduction to Plath and Hughes which can serve as an ideal starting point for both the amateur and the scholarly Dutch reader.

The mock commission for this thesis is to provide a translation for the De Bezige Bij publishing house. De Bezige Bij is one of the leading literary publishers of the Netherlands and Flanders and they publish both Dutch and translated literature (fiction and non-fiction). Their average audience will be used as the target audience for my translation. For (literary) biography, this would be an audience that has specific interest

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, for instance, fifteen love letters of Sylvia Plath have been released (2017) which she wrote to Ted Hughes right after their honeymoon (Singh N. p.) and, also in 2017, unseen letters of Plath have been released that claim she was domestically abused by Hughes (Kean N. p.).

in the subject matter of the biography and that most likely has a certain amount of prior knowledge of the subject. In addition, the Dutch translation by Van Santen and Vosmaer of *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* by James Knowlson has also been published by De Bezige Bij, which is why this biography is a suitable choice to use as parallel text to my translation of *The Silent Woman*, so as to see what kind of strategies (in relation to Christiane Nord's translation categories and Andrew Chesterman's strategies; see below) and styles they have adopted in their translation.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

### 1.1: BIOGRAPHY: THE PHENOMENON

In the first chapter of *The Silent Woman*, Malcolm takes a clear stance on the biographical genre. She describes the biographer as similar to a professional burglar who breaks into a house and knows exactly where to search for his desired loot. As mentioned in the introduction, Malcolm claims that the transgressive nature of biography is what makes it a popular genre, since the biography-loving public prefers to see the biographers as bad guys; the reader wants to break into the life of the biography's subject with the biographer and uncover its secrets. In addition, Ira Nadel in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (1986), explains how "the need to understand the literary techniques and strategies of biography parallels its emergence today as perhaps the most popular, widely-read body of non-fiction writing" (1). He argues that for too long criticism of biography as a genre has centered on the content rather than the form of biographical writing, and thus, undermines its literary properties (Nadel 1). The main goal of his book is to show that biography is "a complex narrative as well as a record of an individual's life, a literary process as well as a historical product" (Nadel 1). To a translator of literary biography, it is essential to take this into account when making a translation-relevant text analysis and drawing up a translation strategy, because biography can consist of multiple genres that are combined into one.

In an article in *The Guardian* in 2015 on Plath's last letter to Hughes, Jonathan Bate, author of *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (2015), stated that "the biographer's work is never done" (Bate N. p.). He explains how there comes a time when the

biographer has gone through all the archives and libraries and has spoken to every witness, and that this is the time when the biographer has to let it go and send it to the publisher. However, there will always be loose ends and unanswered questions, and therefore, the biographer can never finish his work entirely (Bate N. p.). To a translator of (literary) biographies, this is then equally the case. The biographer and the translator are both allocated with numerous tasks, but one important task is to interpret the views and styles of their subjects as adequately as possible. While performing this task, the translator can encounter problems derived from two (or even more) different styles within one single text, namely that of the biographer and that or those of the biographer's subject matter. Consequently, this leads to the following research question of this thesis: How can the translator adequately capture the individual styles of both the literary biography's author and the biography's subject matter? Secondary research questions that arise in relation to the main question are: What are the translation problems that arise when translating literary biography; who is the reader, to what extent should the translator explain the text to the reader and how should it be explained? In order to answer these questions, I will use secondary literature on translation theory within the field of informative and literary texts, particularly biographies, and I will identify the strategies that are used by Malcolm in the source text and the authors' and Dutch translators' strategies in the parallel texts.

## 1.2: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPRETATION AND FACTS

Interpretation within the field of translation ties in with the concept of equivalence. As a concept, equivalence is central to translation studies. It refers to a translation that stands

in an equivalent (literally: “of equal value”) relation to the primary text. The term equivalence, or equivalence theory, was first coined by Roman Jakobson in 1959, when he discussed the problem of translatability and equivalence in meaning (Munday 59). He considered the problem of equivalence in meaning between words in different languages and pointed out that there is “no full equivalence between code-units” (Munday 59). Simultaneously, he mentions the term linguistic relativity, or determinism, which claims that “differences in languages shape different conceptualizations of the world” (Munday 59), which, as a result, may cause differences between the source text and target text in translations and, possibly, differences of interpretation by the reader.

In contemporary translation studies, Gideon Toury’s idea of acceptable versus adequate translation has suggested that the degree of equivalence a translator must strive to achieve is to do with the degree to which he/she is loyal to the source text, or to the audience (324). Corresponding with the problem of translatability and (the degree of) equivalence, in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form*, Ira Nadel argues that “[r]eaders of biography [often] receive a text too passively, they are unaware of being placed in an interpretative position, although the very nature of biography demands it” (2-3). When it comes to biography, interpretation and facts seem inevitably intertwined. It could even be argued that the credibility of the facts which the biographer provides are a benchmark for the reader and his interpretation; the more credible facts in a biography are, the less need there is for the reader to interpret the information he is given. After all, “facts are to biography what character is to the novel – a fundamental element of composition providing authenticity, reality and information” (Nadel 5). Nevertheless, in biographies, facts are often manipulated, altered or misused to sustain an interpretation or



characterization; ironically, readers of biography rarely question facts because they “believe that any fact, no matter how suspect, is superior to any imaginative exercise” (Nadel 5). In chapter 1 of *The Silent Woman*, Malcolm shows how Hughes wrote two versions of his foreword in *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*. In these different versions, the facts around missing diaries of Plath are not clear, because Hughes covered up information around these missing diaries; he either destroyed them or possessed them all along (5). Facts in biographies, like the ones revolving around Plath’s missing diaries, introduce questions regarding the nature of life-writing and literary form. Nadel lists questions that arise regarding this matter, for instance “to what extent is fact necessary in biography?” and “to what degree does the biographer alter fact to fit his theme or pattern?” (5).

To illustrate the complex issue of facts and interpretation in biographies, André Lefevere demonstrates how a comparison between the original edition of Anne Frank’s diaries from 1947 and the academic edition of 1986 offers insight into the ways the image of a writer can be constructed, not only by the writer herself (auto-editing), but also by others (379). He goes on to explain the diaries of Anne Frank underwent three types of editorial adaptations; personal, ideological and paternalistic. In the ‘personal’ category, details were left out that were not deemed relevant. Complimentary references to friends, acquaintances or even family members were also omitted. Similarly, in a footnote in the 1986 edition, it is explained how Anne Frank gave a highly unkind and partially inaccurate description of her parents’ marriage. This passage was deleted either by the Frank family or, as Lefevere suggests, because the editors were forced to give in to

ideological coercion (which Lefevere does not further specify) (381)<sup>2</sup>. These edits are related to the source text, but most differences and inaccuracies, however, were found in Anneliese Schütz's German translation. It appears that Schütz has made mistakes regarding 'equivalence in meaning' (e.g. the Dutch word "ongerust" ('worried') was translated into German as "unruhig" (Dutch 'onrustig', English 'restless')). The biggest and most famous mistake in Schütz's translation is of Anne Frank's phrase "er bestaat geen groter vijandschap op de wereld dan tussen Duitsers en Joden" [there is no greater enmity besides the one between Germans and Jews]. This phrase was translated into German by Schütz as "eine größere Feindschaft als zwischen *diesen* Deutschen und den Juden gibt es nicht auf der Welt" [there is no greater enmity besides the one between *these* Germans and Jews] (Lefevere 384). Here, it becomes clear how ideology got the better of the translator. Schütz felt that a book that needed to be sold in Germany, was not to offend the German public (Lefevere 384). Thus, to shortly answer Nadel's questions, facts and the choices made by a biographer, or by the translator of biography for that matter, are crucial in the biographical genre, because they shape and are the basis for the interpretation of the reader.

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<sup>2</sup> Original quote: "Of, zo u wilt, de redacteurs buigen voor een vorm van ideologische dwang" (Lefevere 381).

## Chapter 2: Translation-Relevant Text Analysis

### 2.1: DEVELOPING A TRANSLATION-RELEVANT TEXT ANALYSIS

Before translating a text, it is helpful to make a translation-relevant text analysis, starting with analyzing the source text. This will allow the translator to determine the course of the translation process and to acquire the desired results (Nord 145). Scholars, for instance Nord and Hans Hönl, have used the Laswell-formula (“who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?”) as a starting point for their translation-relevant text analyses (Nord 145). Nord and Hönl have added the parameters of place (“where?”) and time (“when?”) to this formulation. They both explicitly look at the relation between the source text analysis and the function of the target text. Furthermore, Nord specifically focuses on problems that a translator may encounter and has subdivided these problems into four categories, which are to be tackled in a top-down fashion: pragmatic translation problems, problems that arise from differences in the source and target culture based on norms and conventions, problems that are specifically related to a language pair, and text-specific translation problems (Nord 147).

### 2.2: ESTABLISHING THE TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

First of all, Nord’s category that focuses on pragmatic problems can, for instance, revolve around culturally defined differences between the assumed knowledge of the reader in the source culture and the target culture, respectively. This translation problem is most likely the most frequent one in translating biographies, as it concerns the decision of what additional information needs to be added to the source text or not. The translator could solve these pragmatic problems by adding annotations or end notes to the translation. In

this way, the reader can be referred to additional information to acquire a better understanding of the text or the subject. The translators of *Tot roem gedoemd* follow the original text of James Knowlson and use the same end notes in their translation. In addition, however, for the purpose of easy reference where possible, Vosmaer and Van Santen quote from and refer to passages in Beckett's translated works in their Dutch translation. Despite this, Knowlson also refers to Beckett's novel *Watt* (1953), which was translated by Onno Kusters in 2006, while *Tot roem gedoemd* was published in 2000. The same goes for Beckett's French novel *Mercier et Camier* (1946) (which Beckett translated into English himself in 1970), only this novel has never been translated into Dutch. These two novels are interesting to see what Vosmaer and Van Santen have done in their end notes. However, they refer to *Watt* and *Mercier et Camier* in the same way Knowlson does, so they have chosen not to translate passages themselves for the Dutch reader.

The next translation problem set out by Nord is culture-specific problems. Culture-specific translation problems involve everything that has a 'standard' translation, that is norms and conventions, such as measures of size and length, forms of address, currencies, etc. This category partly overlaps with what Diederik Grit calls "realia". Realia refer to culturally-determined terms and expressions. Realia can be subdivided in several categories, such as historical ('Willem van Oranje'), geographical ('Den Haag') and socio-cultural ('Sinterklaas') (Grit 189).<sup>3</sup> The translator has to decide whether the denotation or connotation of the reale in question is important for the reader in the target

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<sup>3</sup> The first and the last example, if regarded according to Nord's categorization, would be "pragmatic" translation problems.

culture and is left with a number of options, e.g. maintenance, omission, approximation, adaptation or a combination of the aforementioned translation strategies (Grit 192-93). A self-explanatory example in *Damned to Fame* would be the adaptation of the structure of street names, e.g. “31 College Green” in the English version (27) becomes “College Green 31” in the Dutch version (25). Vosmaer and Van Santen have mostly chosen maintaining realia.

The third set of translation problems mapped by Nord is problems that are specifically related to a language pair. Language-pair specific problems are to do with grammatical structures and all linguistic aspects of a language, for instance, the progressive (involves action that is, was or will be in progress at a certain time), which the Dutch language generally does not really have a suitable equivalent for, and the gerund (verb + -ing becomes a noun). Long sentences that are used in the source text are also related to language pairs, since the construction of long sentences in English is often not applicable to Dutch sentences.

Finally, the fourth category of translation problems involves text-specific translation problems. This translation problem revolves around aspects of the text that do not fit into any of the other three categories and, as the name suggests, are specific to one text only. An example is the use of long sentences and the way punctuation is applied in the source text, such as the many dashes that Malcolm uses. In *The Silent Women*, long sentences occur in Malcom’s text as well as in Hughes’s quotes. An example of a long sentence of Malcom is:

In his second foreword Hughes needs to spell out his awareness of the discontinuity between the observing and the observed self: the observed

self (“her husband”) represents the interests of the Hughes children, who must be protected from destructive knowledge, whereas the observing self – whom he calls “we,” as in “we cannot help wondering whether the lost entries for her last three years were not the more important section” – represents the interests of the reader, who wants to understand the relationship between the *Ariel* poems and the poet’s life. (5-6)

And an example of a long quote of Hughes used in *The Silent Woman* is:

Her real self had showed itself in her writing, just for a moment, three years earlier, and when I heard it – the self I had married, after all, and lived with and knew well – in that brief moment, three lines recited as she went out through a doorway, I knew that what I had always felt must happen had now begun to happen, that her real self, being the real poet, would now speak for itself, and would throw off all those lesser and artificial selves that had monopolized the words up to that point. It was as if a dumb person suddenly spoke. (3-4)

Furthermore, this category also revolves around the decision of the translator of either maintaining the sentence structure or splitting it up. It is noteworthy that, in *The Silent Woman*, the translator has more liberty in splitting up Malcolm’s sentences than in doing so in Hughes’s. This is because Malcolm’s part, strictly speaking, belongs to the non-literary, informative text domain, and Hughes’s is literary, which traditionally implies more loyalty to the source text on the linguistic level.

## Chapter 3: Annotated Translation

I chose the first chapter of *The Silent Woman* as it gives a short but clear introduction of what happened to Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes and of what happened to Hughes after Plath's death. In this chapter, Malcolm also introduces the controversy of the biographical genre and how facts in biographies can be misleading.

Andrew Chesterman's subdividing translation strategies into a number of classifications (syntactic strategies [G], semantic strategies [S] and pragmatic strategies [PR] [Chesterman 154-72]) have been useful for my translation to give a better account for my decisions.

### *De gesloten vrouw: Sylvia Plath & Ted Hughes*

Vertaald door Anouk Pijnenburg

Ted Hughes schreef twee versies van zijn voorwoord voor *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*<sup>45</sup>, een selectie van haar dagboekantekeningen gemaakt in de periode 1950 tot en met 1962. De eerste versie (afkomstig uit het in 1982 gepubliceerde boek) is een kort, dichtelijk essay dat draait om één Blakiaans<sup>67</sup> thema – het zogenaamde ‘ware zelf’<sup>8</sup> dat zich

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<sup>4</sup> The Dutch translations of Plath's works in the annotations in this translation are accounted for by Chesterman's classification PR3: change of information; added information that is relevant for the readers in the target text, but that cannot be found in the source text (Chesterman 169).

<sup>5</sup> In het Nederlands gepubliceerd door de Arbeiderspers als *De dagboeken 1950-1962* (2005), vertaald door Nelleke van Maaren.

<sup>6</sup> Refereert aan William Blake, de Engelse dichter en schilder die leefde tussen 1757 en 1827.

<sup>7</sup> “[constructed] on a single Blakean theme” (Malcolm 3). Blakean refers to the English poet William Blake. Even though I could only find one Dutch reference for ‘Blakiaans’, I have chosen to maintain ‘Blakean’ as much as possible. After all, ‘Shakespeariaans’ is the Dutch equivalent for the English term ‘Shakespearean’, hence my Dutch structure of ‘Blakiaans’. I have added an annotation for the Dutch reader to specify the term ‘Blakiaans’. Accounted for by Chesterman's classification G2: borrowed translation (155).

<sup>8</sup> “[theme] of a ‘real self’” (Malcolm 3). The term “real self” is slightly unconventional in Dutch as ‘ware zelf’. Nevertheless, I have chosen to maintain this structure in Dutch and used single quotation marks to

eindelijk kon losmaken van Plaths strijdende pseudo persoonlijkheden en tot triomfantelijke uitdrukking kwam in de gedichten in de *Ariel*<sup>9</sup> bundel, geschreven in het laatste half jaar van haar leven en in wezen de bundel waarop haar hele reputatie rust. Haar andere werken – de korte fictie die ze koppig bleef schrijven en, meestal zonder succes, aan populaire tijdschriften aanbood; haar roman, *The Bell Jar*<sup>10</sup>; haar brieven; haar jeugdwerk, gepubliceerd in haar eerste collectie *The Colossus* – waren volgens Hughes ‘als onzuiverheden die zijn voortgekomen uit de verschillende fasen van de innerlijke transformatie, bijproducten van het inwendige werk’. Hij schrijft over een opmerkelijk moment:

Hoewel ik iedere dag bij haar was gedurende zes jaar en zelden meer dan twee of drie uur van haar gescheiden was, zag ik haar nooit haar ware zelf aan iemand tonen, behalve misschien in de laatste drie maanden van haar leven.

Drie jaar eerder had zij in haar werk kort getoond wie ze werkelijk was en toen ik die versie van haar ware zelf in dat kortstondige moment hoorde – het zelf waar ik tenslotte mee getrouwd was, het leven mee deelde en dat ik goed kende – die drie dichtregels<sup>11</sup> die ze liet vallen terwijl ze naar buiten liep, wist ik dat dat waarvan ik altijd al voelde dat het moest

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introduce it as a new term in the text. Moreover, Malcolm uses double quotation marks in the source text too (“real selves”). Accounted for by Chesterman’s classification G2: borrowed translation (155).

<sup>9</sup> In het Nederlands gepubliceerd door de Bezige Bij als *Ariel* (2015), vertaald door Anneke Brassinga.

<sup>10</sup> In het Nederlands gepubliceerd door de Bezige Bij als *De glazen stolp* (2014), vertaald door René Kurpershoek.

<sup>11</sup> “[three] lines recited” (Malcolm 3). The source text is vague in this quote. It is not clear if Hughes is referring to three lines of Plath’s work or something else. I have decided to translate this as a reference to her work. This decision is accounted for by Chesterman’s classification G1: literal translation; as close to the source text as possible, but still grammatically correct (155).



gebeuren, nu werkelijk was begonnen; haar ware zelf, de ware dichter, zou voortaan voor zichzelf spreken en zou al die minderwaardige en kunstmatige persoonlijkheden die tot dan toe de woorden hadden gemonopoliseerd van zich af schudden. Het was alsof een stomme ineens sprak.<sup>12</sup>

Hughes zegt verder dat ‘wanneer een ware zelf taal ontdekt en gaat spreken, het niets minder dan een adembenemende manifestatie is’. Aangezien de gedichten uit *Ariel* echter weinig onthullen over de ‘incidentele omstandigheden of het wezenlijke innerlijke drama’ waardoor ze zijn voortgebracht, voegt hij eraan toe dat het ‘wellicht nou net de bekendheid van dit bijkomstig detail is dat de wilde fantasieën heeft opgewekt die zijn geprojecteerd door anderen in de naam van Sylvia Plath’. Naar zijn mening zal de publicatie van de dagboeken sommige van deze fantasieën waarschijnlijk de kop indrukken, maar hij licht verder niet toe hoe. Hij constateert slechts dat de dagboeken Plaths ‘constante conflict met haar strijdende persoonlijkheden’ vastleggen en dat deze moeten worden uitgesloten van zijn algehele omschrijving van haar proza als ‘afvalproducten’. Hughes besluit zijn drie bladzijden lange essay met een onthulling die zo onverwachts en plotseling is dat het belang ervan niet direct merkbaar is:

De dagboeken bestaan uit een verzameling van notitieboeken en een reeks afzonderlijke vellen. Deze selectie bevat mogelijk een derde van het totaal en wordt bewaard in de Neilson Bibliotheek op de Smith Universiteit in

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<sup>12</sup> “Though I spent...person suddenly spoke” (Malcolm 3-4) is a perfect example of Hughes’s literary register that contains long sentences. In this quote, I have chosen to maintain this structure, so as to distinguish Hughes’s style and Malcolm’s informative register. This change is accounted for by Chesterman’s classification G4: shift of a unit (156).

Northampton, Massachusetts (Verenigde Staten). Twee andere notitieboeken, vergelijkbaar met de delen uit 1957-1959, zijn nog een tijd intact gebleven en omvatten haar leven vanaf 1959 tot drie dagen voor haar dood in 1963. De laatste van deze boeken bevat dagboek aantekeningen van meerdere maanden. Ik heb deze vernietigd omdat ik niet wilde dat haar kinderen deze hoefden te lezen (in die tijd zag ik vergetelheid als een essentieel onderdeel van overleving). Het andere deel is verdwenen.

De tweede versie van het voorwoord is eerst gepubliceerd in *Grand Street*<sup>13</sup> in 1982 en verscheen drie jaar later in een bundel van werken over Plath genaamd *Ariel Ascending* (geredigeerd door Paul Alexander). Dit voorwoord is aanzienlijk langer, gewichtiger en gecompliceerder; het mist de verfijnde eenzijdigheid van de eerste versie. Het lijkt alsof Hughes naar zijn eerste versie keek en deze vervolgens de hand wees, zoals een schrijver meerdere vroege pogingen terzijde moet schuiven om uiteindelijk te kunnen ontdekken wat hij daadwerkelijk wil zeggen. (Je zou het zelfs een verwerping van onzuiverheden kunnen noemen). In zijn tweede voorwoord noemt Hughes zijn onthulling over de verloren dagboeken helemaal aan het begin:

‘De dagboeken van Sylvia Plath bestaan uit een verzameling van notitieboeken en een reeks afzonderlijke vellen. De selectie die in deze versie is uitgegeven bevat ongeveer een derde deel van het totaal. Twee andere notitieboeken zijn na haar dood nog een tijd intact gebleven. Zij

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<sup>13</sup> *Grand Street* is een Amerikaans literair tijdschrift dat ieder kwartaal verscheen van 1981 tot 2004.

gingen verder waar de bestaande documenten zijn gestopt in eind 1959 en omvatten de laatste drie jaar van haar leven. De tweede van deze twee versies is vernietigd door haar man, omdat hij niet wilde dat haar kinderen die hoefden te lezen (in die tijd zag hij vergetelheid als een essentieel onderdeel van overleving). De eerste versie is onlangs verdwenen (en zou mogelijk nog op kunnen duiken).’

Het valt op dat Hughes in deze tweede versie twee aanpassingen heeft gemaakt. De eerste aanpassing is dat hij hoopt dat het ‘verdwenen’ dagboek misschien nog opduikt (en laat hij tevens doorschemeren dat het dagboek misschien in zijn bezit is en dit wellicht altijd al is geweest). In de andere aanpassing, welke van groter belang is, is Hughes zelf verdwenen: ‘Ik heb vernietigd’ is nu ‘haar man heeft vernietigd’ geworden. Hughes kan niet langer de fictie in stand houden – een fictie waar alle autobiografieën overigens op berusten – dat diegene die schrijft en diegene waarover geschreven wordt een naadloos geheel zijn. In zijn tweede voorwoord moet Hughes zijn bewustwording van de discontinuïteit tussen zijn eigen observeerder en geobserveerde expliciet uitleggen. De geobserveerde (‘haar man’) representeert de belangen van de kinderen van Hughes die beschermd moeten worden tegen verwoestende kennis. De observeerder – die hij ‘wij’ noemt, zoals in ‘wij vragen ons af of de verdwenen documenten van haar laatste drie levensjaren niet het belangrijkste deel waren’ – representeert het belang van de lezer die het verband tussen de gedichten uit de *Ariel* bundel en het leven van de dichtster willen begrijpen. Het uitgeven van Plaths dagboeken is klaarblijkelijk gedaan om dit

verband te verhelderen<sup>14</sup>. Desondanks heeft deze verwoestende daad van ‘haar man’ de Plath onderneming haast bestempeld als een lachertje. De dagboeken die licht werpen op de gedichten uit de *Ariel* bundel – de dagboeken die geschreven zijn in de tijd dat ze haar gedichten schreef – zijn namelijk de dagboeken die hij heeft vernietigd en kwijt is geraakt. Dit is het raadsel dat Hughes in zijn tweede voorwoord moet oplossen en dit is ook waarom hij met wanhopige eerlijkheid (wat een lezer zonder inlevingsvermogen kan verwarren met ontwijkend gedrag) zichzelf heeft gesplitst – of zich er zelfs in heeft verloren – in deze twee persoonlijkheden. Geen van deze persoonlijkheden heeft ‘gelijk’ of ‘ongelijk’, maar ze drukken wel de onmogelijkheid van zijn situatie als zowel revisor en vernietiger figuratief uit.

In de loop van zijn tweede voorwoord maakt Hughes een Houdini-achtige ontsnapping uit de kist waar hij zich in heeft gepropt en vervolgens in de rivier heeft laten gooien. Terwijl hij schrijft over een mysterieus, hermetisch afgesloten traject van een psychologische wedergeboorte die plaatsvindt binnenin Plath – waar ook de gedichten uit de *Ariel* bundel uit ontstaan zijn en waar de onaangetaste dagboeken een belangrijk deel van maken – verdwijnen langzaam de botsende rollen van de verwoestende man en de geërgerde redacteur. De tegenstrijdige benamingen ‘haar man’ en ‘wij’ komen steeds minder vaak voor. Een nieuwe gedaante, een kalm en kritisch wezen, wordt geïntroduceerd in het essay die vastberaden de touwtjes in handen neemt en ons meesleept in het spannende en enerverende verhaal van Plaths totstandkoming als poëet.

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<sup>14</sup> “In his second...the poet’s life” (Malcolm 5-6) is the example given in paragraph 2.2 of this thesis. In the source text, Malcolm uses her literary writing skills to form this sentence and uses several punctuation marks that link the segments together without using a full stop. To distinguish Malcolm’s and Hughes’s writing styles, I have chosen to split this sentence to make it a more pleasant read for the Dutch reader. This decision has been applied in other structures too in this translation.

Tegen het einde van het essay is het probleem van de ontbrekende dagboeken slechts een kleine stip aan de horizon. Hughes is erin geslaagd om ons van het probleem weg te leiden omdat hij ons hierop heeft voorbereid. Toen hij zijn bekentenis aflegde aan het einde van zijn eerste versie was het alsof hij plots een onbegaanbaar rotsblok op het pad van de lezer had gerold. Maar door aan het begin van zijn tweede versie het rotsblok meteen op de juiste plek te leggen, is hij in staat om de lezer manieren aan te bieden om er omheen te lopen: door het probleem ervan te erkennen, door de verleiding om het te bagatelliseren te weerstaan, door het aan de kant te schuiven.

Zoals we allemaal weten biedt het leven niet altijd – zoals kunstvormen dat wel doen – een tweede (of derde of dertiende) kans om lang aan te modderen met een probleem. Het verleden van Ted Hughes lijkt echter ongewoon weinig van dit soort barmhartige momenten te hebben waarin het mogelijk is om acties over te doen of terug te draaien en dus het gevoel te krijgen dat het leven niet alleen noodlottig hoeft te zijn. Wat Hughes dan ook over heeft willen doen of terug heeft willen draaien in zijn relatie met Sylvia Plath, die kans werd hem ontnomen toen zij zelfmoord pleegde in februari 1963 door haar hoofd in een gasoven te steken. Haar twee kleine kinderen lagen te slapen in een andere kamer, die ze had afgestopt tegen de gasdampen en waar ze mokjes met melk en een bordje met brood had neergezet voor wanneer ze wakker werden. Plath en Hughes woonden niet samen op het moment van haar zelfmoord. Ze waren zes jaar getrouwd – zij was dertig en hij was tweeëndertig toen zij overleed – en waren de herfst daarvoor met veel stampij uit elkaar gegaan. Er was een andere vrouw. Het is een situatie waar veel jonge getrouwde stellen zich in bevinden – eentje waar stellen zich zelfs eerder wel dan niet in vinden – maar het is ook een situatie die doorgaans niet standhoudt: het

stel vindt elkaar terug of gaat uit elkaar. Het leven gaat door. De pijn en bitterheid en de opwindende ellende van seksuele jaloezie en seksuele schuld nemen af en verdwijnen uiteindelijk. Mensen worden ouder. Ze vergeven zichzelf en elkaar en realiseren misschien zelfs dat datgene waar ze zichzelf en elkaar voor vergeven jeugdigheid is. Iemand die echter overlijdt op haar dertigste en op dat moment ook middenin een rommelige scheiding zit, blijft voor altijd vastzitten in die puinhoop. Voor de lezers van haar gedichten en haar biografie blijft Sylvia Plath altijd jong en woedend over de ontrouw van Hughes. Zij zal nooit de leeftijd bereiken waarop ze met berouwvol medeleven en zonder woede en wraakzucht kan terugkijken naar de onrust van haar jeugd. Ted Hughes heeft deze leeftijd wel bereikt – hij heeft het enige tijd geleden al bereikt – maar de vrede die deze leeftijd met zich meebrengt is hem ontnomen door de beroemdheid van Plath na haar dood en de fascinatie van het publiek voor haar levensverhaal. Doordat hij deel uit maakte van dit leven – het meest intrigerende figuur gedurende die laatste zes jaar – blijft ook hij vastzitten in de chaos en onduidelijkheid van die laatste periode. Net als de klassieke mythe Prometheus<sup>15</sup>, wiens geteisterde lever nachtelijk herstelde zodat het opnieuw dagelijks geteisterd kon worden, heeft Hughes moeten toekijken hoe zijn jonge zelf werd bestudeerd door biografen, academici, recensenten, schrijvers en journalisten. Vreemdelingen, waarvan Hughes het gevoel heeft dat ze niks weten over zijn huwelijk met Plath, schrijven erover met bezitterig gezag. ‘Ik hoop dat ieder van ons kennis heeft over de feiten van zijn of haar eigen leven’, schreef

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<sup>15</sup> “Like Prometheus, whose...and newspaper journalists” (Malcolm 8). Even though Malcolm already clarifies the myth of Prometheus to a certain degree by adding the part of Prometheus’s liver, I have chosen to add “de klassieke mythe” to the text to notify the reader that this story refers to a classical myth. This decision is accounted for by Chesterman’s classification S5: change of abstraction level; the target is text is made more concrete.

Hughes in een brief aan de *Independent* in april 1989 toen hij werd uitgedaagd door een bijzonder opdringerig artikel. Echter, zoals iedereen weet die ooit een roddel gehoord heeft, ‘bezitten’ wij natuurlijk helemaal niet de feiten van ons eigen leven. Dit eigendomsrecht verliezen we bij de geboorte, op het moment dat we voor het eerst geobserveerd worden. De verschillende organen van de publiciteit die steeds meer zijn toegenomen, zijn slechts een toevoeging aan de fundamentele en onverbeterlijke bemoeizucht van de maatschappij. Onze zaken zijn de zaak van iedereen, mocht iemand graag willen dat het dat wordt. Het idee van privacy is een soort scherm waarachter het feit dat bijna niks mogelijk is in een sociaal universum verscholen wordt. In ieder conflict tussen het onschendbare recht van het publiek om geamuseerd te worden en de wens van het individu om met rust gelaten te worden, zegeviert het publiek vrijwel altijd. Zodra we dood zijn wordt de schijn dat we op de een of andere manier beschermd zijn tegen de achteloze kwaadwilligheid van de wereld achterwege gelaten. Het rechtsgebied dat onze goede naam zou moeten beschermen tegen smaad en laster haakt onverschillig af. De reputaties van de doden kunnen niet worden aangetast<sup>16</sup>. Zij hebben geen rechtsmiddelen.

Biografie is het medium waarin de resterende geheimen van de beroemde overledenen worden afgepakt en voor het oog van de hele wereld worden gedumpt. De biograaf is in zijn werk net een professionele inbreker die een huis binnendringt, laadjes binnenstebuiten keert waarvan hij met voorbedachten rade denkt dat er sieraden of geld in liggen, en trots zijn buit binnenhaalt. Het voyeurisme en bemoeizuchtige dat zowel de schrijvers als de lezers aantrekt tot een biografie worden verhuld door een academisch

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<sup>16</sup> “The dead cannot be libeled or slandered” (Malcolm 8). In Dutch, ‘smaad’ and ‘laster’ are nouns, while in English they are both noun and verb. I have chosen to combine these two verbs of the source text into one meaning and one sentence in the target text, since these two terms hold the same connotation.

orgaan dat bedoeld is om het genre een uiterlijk van bankachtige eentonigheid en degelijkheid te geven. De biografie wordt zelfs bijna neergezet als een soort weldoener. Hij wordt gezien als iemand die jaren van zijn leven opgeeft om onvermoeid de archieven en bibliotheken uit te kammen en geduldig interviews met getuigen af te nemen. Hij is bereid om tot het uiterste te gaan. Hoe meer zijn boek zijn branche weerspiegelt, des te meer de lezer gelooft dat hij een geestverheffende literaire ervaring ondergaat in plaats van simpelweg te moeten luisteren naar geroddel of berichten van anderen mensen te moeten lezen. De grensoverschrijdende aard van biografie wordt zelden erkend, maar is desondanks de enige verklaring voor de populariteit van dit genre. De verbazingwekkende verdraagzaamheid van de lezer (wat hij niet zou hebben bij romans die half zo slecht zijn geschreven als de meeste biografieën) is alleen te verklaren wanneer het gezien wordt als een samenspanning tussen hem en de biografie in een spannende en verboden onderneming: samen op de tenen door de gang sluipen, voor de slaapkamerdeur staan en proberen door het sleutelgat te spieken.

Zo nu en dan wordt er een biografie gepubliceerd die het publiek op een vreemde manier ontstemt. Iets zorgt ervoor dat de lezer afstand neemt van de schrijver en weigert hem te vergezellen door de gang. Wat de lezer normaal gesproken leest in de tekst – wat hem aantrekt tot het gevaar – is een twijfelachtige toon, het geluid van een scheur die opengaat in de muur van de zelfverzekerdheid van de biografie. Net zoals een inbreker niet hoort te stoppen met het openbreken van een slot om met zijn handlanger de voors en tegens van inbraak af te wegen, zou een biografie niet onzekerheden moeten introduceren over de legitimiteit van het biografisch genre. Het publiek dat biografieën lief heeft wil



niet horen dat biografie een onvolmaakt genre is. Het gelooft liever dat biografen de slechteriken zijn.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

In the first paragraph of chapter one in this thesis, I stated my main research question as: How can the translator adequately capture the individual styles of both the literary biography's author and the biography's subject matter? The secondary research questions that tie in with the main question were: What are the translation problems that arise when translating literary biography; who is the reader, to what extent should the translator explain the text to the reader and how should it be explained?

Right after translating the first paragraph of the first chapter of *The Silent Woman*, I discovered that I had set the translator in me, whose career is still in its infancy, a considerable challenge. The long-sentence structures in the source text and the combination of Malcolm's non-literary text and, in contrast, her literary style versus Hughes's highly literary register, proved that this translation would be a process of trial and error and a great deal of re-evaluation. However, by establishing a clear translation-relevant text analysis and by adhering to Nord's translation categories and Chesterman's strategies in my translation, it became easier to divide the different styles of the biographer, in this case Malcolm, and the biographer's subject, in this case Hughes.

I consider the pragmatic translation problems to be the most important in this text and possibly of biographies in general. Biographies are concerned with a reader that has a specific interest in a subject, and both the biographer and the translator owe the reader additional information when required, for instance by giving the reader other literary options of Sylvia Plath's works, like Vosmaer and Van Santen have done in *Tot roem gedoemd* for Beckett's works.

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## Appendix: Source Text

*THE SILENT WOMAN: SYLVIA PLATH & TED HUGHES* – BY JANET MALCOLM

Ted Hughes wrote two versions of his foreword to *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, a selection of diary entries covering the years between 1950 and 1962. The first version (the one that appears in the book, published in 1982) is a short, lyrical essay constructed on a single Blakean theme – the theme of a “real self” that finally emerged from among Plath’s warring “false selves” and found triumphant expression in the *Ariel* poems, which were written in the last half year of her life and are the whole reason for her poetical reputation. In Hughes’s view, her other writings – the short fiction she doggedly wrote and submitted, mostly unsuccessfully, to popular magazines; her novel, *The Bell Jar*; her letters; her apprentice poems, published in her first collection, *The Colossus* – “were like impurities thrown off from the various stages of the inner transformation, by-products of the internal work”. He writes about a remarkable prefigurative moment:

“Though I spent every day with her for six years, and was rarely separated from her for more than two or three hours at a time, I never saw her show her real self to anybody – except, perhaps, in the last three months of her life.

Her real self had showed itself in her writing, just for a moment, three years earlier, and when I heard it – the self I had married, after all, and lived with and knew well – in that brief moment, three lines recited as she went out through a doorway, I knew that what I had always felt must happen had now begun to happen, that her real self, being the real poet, would now speak for itself, and would throw off all those lesser and

artificial selves that had monopolized the words up to that point. It was as if a dumb person suddenly spoke.”

Hughes goes on to say that “when a real self finds language, and manages to speak, it is surely a dazzling event”. However, because the *Ariel* poems reveal little about the “incidental circumstances or the crucial inner drama” that produced them, he pauses to reflect that “maybe it is this very bareness of circumstantial detail that has excited the wilder fantasies projected by others in Sylvia Plath’s name”. Publication of the journals, he feels, will presumably lay some of these fantasies to rest, but he does not elaborate on how they will do this; he merely notes that they record Plath’s “day to day struggle with her warring selves” and are to be exempted from his overall characterization of her prose writings as “waste products”. Hughes ends his three-page essay with a revelation that is so unexpected and so abrupt that one doesn’t immediately take in its significance:

“The journals exist in an assortment of notebooks and bunches of loose sheets. This selection contains perhaps a third of the whole bulk, which is now in the Neilson Library at Smith College. Two more notebooks survived for a while, maroon-backed ledgers like the ’57-’59 volume, and continued the record from late ’59 to within three days of her death. The last of these contained entries for several months, and I destroyed it because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The other disappeared.”

The second version of the foreword, published in *Grand Street* in 1982 and, three years later, in an anthology of writings about Plath called *Ariel Ascending*, edited by Paul

Alexander, is considerably longer, denser, and more complex; it hasn't the elegant single-threadedness of the first version. It is as if Hughes looked at his first version and cast it aside as one of the too simple and too pretty false starts that a writer must make as a necessary part of finding out what he wants to say. (You could even call it a throwing off of impurities.) In his second foreword Hughes puts his revelation about the lost journals at the very beginning:

“Sylvia Plath’s journals exist as an assortment of notebooks and bunches of loose sheets, and the selection just published here contains about a third of the whole bulk. Two other notebooks survived for a while after her death. They continued from where the surviving records breaks off in late 1959 and covered the last three years of her life. The second of these two books her husband destroyed, because he did not want her children to have to read it in those days he regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The earlier one disappeared more recently (and may, presumably, still turn up).”

We note that Hughes has made two changes. In one he holds out hope that the “disappeared” journal may eventually reappear (inviting the speculation that the journal is in fact, and may always have been, in his hands). In the other, and more crucial, change he has himself disappeared: “I destroyed” now becomes “her husband destroyed”. Hughes can no longer sustain the fiction – on which all autobiographical writing is poised – that the person writing and the person being written about are a single seamless entity. In his second foreword Hughes needs to spell out his awareness of the discontinuity between the observing and the observed self: the observed self (“her husband”) represents

the interests of the Hughes children, who must be protected from destructive knowledge, whereas the observing self – whom he calls “we,” as in “We cannot help wondering whether the lost entries for her last three years were not the more important section” – represents the interests of the reader, who wants to understand the relationship between the *Ariel* poems and the poet’s life. The publication of Plath’s journals was evidently undertaken to elucidate this relationship. But “her husband”’s destructive act has made a kind of mockery of the enterprise, since the journals that would cast light on the *Ariel* poems – the journals written while the poems were being composed – are the ones he destroyed and lost. This is the conundrum that Hughes must solve in his second foreword, and this is why he has, with helpless honesty (which an unsympathetic reader could mistake for evasiveness), divided himself into – you could even say lost himself in – the two selves, neither one “true” or “false”, that allegorize the impossibility of this situation as both editor and destroyer.

In the course of his second foreword Hughes makes a Houdiniesque escape from the trunk he has stuffed himself into and has had thrown in the river. As he writes of a mysterious, urgent, hermetically sealed process of psychological rebirth going on within Plath, from which the *Ariel* poems came and to which the surviving journals are a key, the warring roles of the destructive husband and the irked editor quietly recede. The jarring designations “her husband” and “we” are heard less and less frequently, and a new figure, a serene critical intelligence, enters the essay and firmly takes charge of its purposes, riveting us with the suspenseful, elating narrative of Plath’s poetic emergence. By the end of the essay, the problem of the missing journals is a dot on the distant horizon. Hughes has been able to lead us away from it because he has led us up to it.



When he made his confession at the end of his first version, it was as if he had suddenly rolled an impassable boulder into the reader's path. By beginning his second version with the boulder in place, he is able to propose ways of getting around it: by acknowledging difficulty, by resisting the temptation to minimize it, by moving sideways.

Life, as we all know, does not reliably offer – as art does – a second (and a third and a thirtieth) chance to tinker with a problem, but Ted Hughes's history seems to be uncommonly bare of the moments of mercy that allow one to undo or redo one's actions and thus feel that life isn't entirely tragic. Whatever Hughes might have undone or redone in his relationship to Sylvia Plath, the opportunity was taken from him when she committed suicide, in February of 1963, by putting her head in a gas oven as her two small children slept in a bedroom nearby, which she had sealed against gas fumes, and where she had placed mugs of milk and a plate of bread for them to find when they awoke. Plath and Hughes were not living together at the time of her death. They had been married for six years – she was thirty and he was thirty-two when she died – and had separated the previous fall in a turbulent way. There was another woman. It is a situation that many young married couples find themselves in – one that perhaps more couples find themselves in than don't – but it is a situation that ordinarily doesn't last: the couple either reconnects or dissolves. Life goes on. The pain and bitterness and exciting awfulness of sexual jealousy and sexual guilt recede and disappear. People grow older. They forgive themselves and each other, and may even come to realize that what they are forgiving themselves and each other for is youth.

But a person who dies at thirty in the middle of a messy separation remains forever fixed in the mess. To the readers of her poetry and her biography, Sylvia Plath

will always be young and in a rage over Hughes's unfaithfulness. She will never reach the age when the tumults of young adulthood can be looked back upon with rueful sympathy and without anger and vengefulness. Ted Hughes has reached this age – he reached it some time ago – but he has been cheated of the peace that age brings by the posthumous fame of Plath and by the public's fascination with the story of her life. Since he was part of that life – the most interesting figure in it during its final six years – he, too, remains fixed in the chaos and confusion of its final period. Like Prometheus, whose ravaged liver was daily reconstituted so it could be daily reravaged, Hughes has had to watch his young self being picked over by biographers, scholars, critics, article writers, and newspaper journalists. Strangers who Hughes feels know nothing about his marriage to Plath write about it with proprietary authority. "I hope each of us owns the facts of her or his own life", Hughes wrote in a letter to the *Independent* in April, 1989, when he had been goaded by a particularly intrusive article. But, of course, as everyone knows who has ever heard a piece of gossip, we do not "own" the facts of our lives at all. This ownership passes out of our hands at birth, at the moment we are first observed. The organs of publicity that have proliferated in our time are only an extension and a magnification of society's fundamental and incorrigible nosiness. Our business is everybody's business, should anybody wish to make it so. The concept of privacy is a sort of screen to hide the fact that almost none is possible in a social universe. In any struggle between the public's inviolable right to be diverted and an individual's wish to be left alone, the public almost always prevails. After we are dead, the pretense that we may somehow be protected against the world's careless malice is abandoned. The branch of the law that putatively protects our good name against libel and slander withdraws

from us indifferently. The dead cannot be libeled or slandered. They are without legal recourse.

Biography is the medium through which the remaining secrets of the famous dead are taken from them and dumped out in full view of the world. The biographer at work, indeed, is like the professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through certain drawers that he has good reason to think contain the jewelry and money, and triumphantly bearing his loot away. The voyeurism and busybodyism that impel writers and readers of biography alike are obscured by an apparatus of scholarship designed to give the enterprise an appearance of banklike blandness and solidity. The biographer is portrayed almost as a kind of benefactor. He is seen as sacrificing years of his life to his task, tirelessly sitting in archives and libraries and patiently conducting interviews with witnesses. There is no length he will not go to, and the more his book reflects his industry the more the reader believes that he is having an elevating literary experience, rather than simply listening to backstairs gossip and reading other people's mail. The transgressive nature of biography is rarely acknowledged, but it is the only explanation for biography's status as a popular genre. The reader's amazing tolerance (which he would extend to no novel written half as badly as most biographies) makes sense only when seen as a kind of collusion between him and the biographer in an excitingly forbidden undertaking: tiptoeing down the corridor together, to stand in front of the bedroom door and try to peep through the keyhole.

Every now and then, a biography comes along that strangely displeases the public. Something causes the reader to back away from the writer and refuse to accompany him down the corridor. What the reader has usually heard in the text – what has altered him to

danger – is the sound of doubt, the sound of a crack opening in the wall of the biographer's self-assurance. As a burglar should not pause to discuss with his accomplice the rights and wrongs of burglary while he is jimmying a lock, so a biographer ought not to introduce doubts about the legitimacy of the biographical enterprise. The biography-loving public does not want to hear that biography is a flawed genre. It prefers to believe that certain biographers are bad guys.