

International Conference “On the Periphery of History: Marginal Lives in Contemporary Biofiction”

Universitat de València, Spain

June 12-13, 2025

Literary interest in historical figures has been a common phenomenon since antiquity, so much so that the connection between literature and biography –as a branch of history– has always proven to be a vexed question in that one cannot oftentimes tell the two genres apart: history informs fiction and, in turn, fiction enriches, revises, alters, manipulates, or challenges history. Over the last few decades, this same question –still vexed and stimulating– has engaged and even haunted authors, critics, and general readers alike. Many recent studies have reconsidered and discussed the theoretical, ethical, and philosophical implications of how **fiction intrudes into the domains of history and biography** under the banner of biofiction, a highly productive neologism that has become the primary object of inquiry in Edel Semple and Ronan Hatfull’s *Shakespearean Biofiction on the Contemporary Stage and Screen* (2023), Virginia Newhall Rademacher’s *Derivative Lives* (2022), Caitríona Ní Dhúill and Julia Novak’s *Imagining Gender in Biographical Fiction* (2022), Michael Lackey’s *Biofiction: An Introduction* (2021), Monica Latham’s *Virginia Woolf’s Afterlives* (2021), Christian Gutleben and Marie-Luise Kohlke’s *Neo-Victorian Biofiction* (2020), Nora Goldschmidt’s *Afterlives of the Roman Poets* (2019), or Ann Heilmann’s *Neo-Victorian Biographilia and James Miranda Barry* (2018) –to name but a few amongst the latest volumes on the subject.

Contemporary works such as Tom Crewe’s *The New Life* (2023), Zadie Smith’s *The Fraud* (2023), Alan Spence’s *Mister Timeless Blyth* (2023), Elizabeth Lowry’s *The Chosen* (2022), Colm Tóibín’s *The Magician* (2021), Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet* (2020), and Emma Donoghue’s *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), all attest to the unfading interest in transforming historical subjects into fictional ones, blurring the boundaries between **truth**

and imagination while also calling for new critical revisions and perspectives on the formal and ethical challenges of biofiction. These perspectives need not only to rethink the representation of prominent and canonical figures of the likes of those revisited in some of the novels formerly mentioned, but also to accommodate more rehabilitative and democratising approaches to figures that macrohistory has tended to neglect and relegate to the periphery of greater narratives and events. In other words, studying biofiction today necessarily entails foregrounding microhistorical voices that urge us to implement new heuristic and hermeneutic models of revisionism, **rehabilitation**, and memorialisation. Gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, and other social variables need to be factored into the study of such marginal subjects of the past, whose biofictional lives are made relevant to our understanding of distant and recent histories –in their most open plurality.

The **International Conference “On the Periphery of History: Marginal Lives in Contemporary Biofiction”** welcomes researchers interested in contemporary rewritings of past lives and invites them to address the following topics –or similar ones– in 20-minute paper presentations:

- Biofiction, historiography, and literary theory
- Post-truth and ethical challenges in contemporary biofiction
- Microhistory, memory, revisionism, and biofiction
- Historical fiction, historiographic metafiction, biographilia
- Intermediality and biofiction: literature, film, TV, theatre
- Historical justice as poetic justice in biofiction
- Representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary biofiction
- Marginalised women in contemporary biofiction
- Race, ethnicity, and class in contemporary biofiction
- Contemporary biofiction from postcolonial and transnational perspectives
- Secondary characters in biofictions on canonical and prominent figures
- Ancient and modern lives in contemporary narratives
- Forgotten authors and artists in contemporary biofiction

Keynote Speakers:

Monica Latham, Professor of English Literature at the Université de Lorraine à Nancy, specialist in Virginia Woolf and contemporary biofiction, and author of *Virginia Woolf's Afterlives: The Author as Character in Fiction and Drama* (2020) and *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism: Rewriting Mrs Dalloway* (2015).

Helen Davies, Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Wolverhampton, specialist in Neo-Victorian culture, and disability studies, and author of *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (2012) and *Neo-Victorian Freakery: The Cultural Afterlife of the Victorian Freak Show* (2015).

Submission Guidelines:

Abstract proposals (up to 300 words) should be sent to Mayron E. Cantillo-Lucuará (Mayron.Cantillo@uv.es) by **31 March 2025**. Submissions should include author's name, affiliation and email address, title of the paper, up to 5 keywords, and a short bio-note. Notifications of acceptance or rejection will be sent before 15 April 2025.

The language of the conference is English, although submissions in Spanish and Catalan will also be considered.

Registration fees:

- Speakers: 90 Euros
- Students: 20 Euros
- Registration details will be posted online in January 2025.