

Biofiction, Documentality and the Internet: metamorphoses of a Literary Genre

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1. Biography and fiction: narratological implications

Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Marbot* is a treasure trove from a narratological point of view: viz. the brilliant observations on it in Gérard Genette's *Fiction et diction* and in Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction*. Its author was a well-known German writer and biographer, born in Hamburg in 1916, who had already published a famous biography of Mozart in 1977. *Marbot*, published in 1981, is also a sort of biographical narrative, and its hero, Andrew Marbot, is presented as a minor English Romantic. A few months after the publication of the first German edition, an English professor of German History, J.P. Stern, wrote an article for the «London Review of Books» in which he praised the thoroughness of this study, its subtle ability to let the documents talk, and the novelty of this portrait of a minor English Romantic poet who corresponded with some of the most important European writers, such as Goethe and Giacomo Leopardi¹. Stern's review appeared in the issue of 5 August 1982, and in September the same journal published a letter to the Editor signed by the author himself:

SIR: To my dismay, I find that the reviewer of my latest book, *Marbot*, has missed the point of the book: namely, the fact that the hero of this biography has never existed. He is purely fictitious and has no model in cultural history (nor, for that

matter, in history). The quotations from his writings, his letters, the letters of Lady Catherine, his diaries etc are my own and so are the English translations. The illustrations of his family portraits depict a certain Baron Schwiter, Mrs Robert Scott Moncrieff, a Herr von Boist etc. There is no *Marbot Hall*, neither in Northumberland nor anywhere else, nor is there Redford. On the other hand, all persons except the *Marbot* family, Father van Rossum and Anna Maria Baiardi have existed, including Sir David Brewster, the inventor of the kaleidoscope.

Marbot's non-existence might easily have been found out by looking him up in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in Goethe's *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, the *Letters of Otilie von Goethe*, or Schopenhauer and Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the diaries of Delacroix, Berlioz, Count Platen and Lady Charlotte Bury, the writings of de Quincey, Boisserée, Bunsen, Ruskin and others, the biographies of Byron, Rumohr, etc. You will look for him in vain.

In my view, it speaks for the book that the reviewer has taken *Marbot's* existence for granted. In fact, he could have existed. My book might have begun as a joke – I don't remember – but it became increasingly more serious. One does not work four years on a joke.

Wolfgang Hildesheimer

Poschiavo, Switzerland²

In short: Andrew *Marbot* has never existed, he is only a fictional character. But in actual fact, the main reason for this, to us, funny and, to professor Stern,

embarrassing misunderstanding is, strangely enough, not clearly stated in this letter. Marbot is actually one of the rare examples of postmodern fiction which lacks the typical «signposts of fictionality», to put it in Dorrit Cohn's terms. I.e.: neither para-textual clues nor textual devices are present, such as psycho-narration or indirect free style, traditionally found in third person narrative fiction. On the contrary, the cover of the book says: *Marbot. A Biography*; in the illustrated pages portraits of Andrew and his family appear, as well as of Giacomo Leopardi; at the end of the book there is even an Index of Personal Names, just like in non-fictional biographies. And above all, the narrative voice uses the same structures as in a historical narrative: no direct insight in a character's interiority, but quotations from letters and diaries; no psychological omniscience, but hypotheses and inferences just like in a genuine biography. The following example is a case in point:

We may assume that in the houses to which he was invited Andrew was more interested in the paintings than in the other guests...³

In his letter to the editor, as I have mentioned above, Hildesheimer omits all reference to these typical narratological devices. However, they are the subject of the entire fifth chapter, dedicated to *Marbot*, of Dorrit Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction*⁴. *Marbot* is in fact a «fictional biography» (about this definition more later) *without* the traditional signposts of fictional discourse. I will not digress further into this topic, but only stress that, to Cohn, *Marbot* was just a *hapax*, an *unicum*, an unusual case, not a new textual category and did not represent a genre. To her, our general idea of what fiction is, and what it is not, cannot be altered by experiments of this kind. She strongly believed in an *ontological* difference between fiction and non-fiction. I wonder, were she still alive, what she would think of the extraordinary proliferation of hybrid genres such as autofictions, biofictions, factions and so on which we have seen in the last 15 years...

But let us return to Hildesheimer's letter to the editor, and particularly to these lines:

Marbot's non-existence might easily have been found out by looking him up in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in Goethe's Gespräche mit Eckermann,

the Letters of Otilie von Goethe, or Schopenhauer and Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the diaries of Delacroix, Berlioz, Count Platen and Lady Charlotte Bury, the writings of de Quincey, Boisseree, Bunsen, Ruskin and others, the biographies of Byron, Rumohr, etc. You will look for him in vain.

The simple consultation of an encyclopaedia or a quick check of the works quoted above would mercifully reveal *Marbot's* fictionality, Hildesheimer argues. We might agree with him, that the unfortunate reviewer should of course have done that. But the problem is that books are not written for critics. Let us therefore try to imagine the behaviour of a common reader in 1981. Let us suppose that this hypothetical reader suspected a fake, or quite simply wanted to know more about Andrew Marbot: he would then probably go to the nearest public library, browse one of the 32 volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and search in vain for the name of Andrew Marbot. Once he had discovered that there was no mention of Andrew Marbot, he might have delved deeper, browsing, perhaps, Goethe's *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, or one of the other many books from which Hildesheimer extracts his fictional quotations about Marbot, and thus find that those quotations simply do not exist (or do not refer to Marbot). In half a morning's work the author would have been completely unmasked. Half a morning: an affordable time for a professor of German History who is a contributor to the «London Review of Books», but definitely not to be expected of a common reader.

Furthermore, it is very easy to imagine a similar situation today: everyone could, in less than fifteen minutes and without venturing out, discover the non-existence of an English poet called Andrew Marbot, either in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (online since 2008), or for that matter in any other encyclopaedia on the web (including Wikipedia). No web pages on Andrew Marbot exist (except for the book of Hildesheimer, of course), at least using common search engines like Google or Bing. Nothing is to be found in the full text of *Gespräche mit Eckermann* as it appears on the Gutenberg Projects site. No clues of this fellow's existence in Google Books either. Checking this only takes a few minutes. What does it signify?

It signifies that the availability of big data, electronic archives, digital libraries, web encyclopaedias and so

on has radically changed not only the the workings of literary criticism, as Morettis «distant reading» claims, but also *the way of reading texts*, or at least certain kinds of texts (*hybrid texts*, where e.g. the border between fiction and reality is more subtle and elusive than in «pure» fiction), and therefore *the way of writing them too*. In short: in 2015 a book like *Marbot* would not only not produce the same reactions as in the 1981 reader (except in the case of extreme idle or naïve readers...), but above all *Marbot* would never have been written in 2015, or at least not in the same way that it was. On the one hand, this means that *readers* of hybrid texts today can conduct the reading process in a sort of augmented reality, due to easy access to information sources available on the web. On the other hand, *writers* of hybrid texts now have a wider range of narrative choices.

2. Biofiction

But this is not all. Analogous (and even more interesting) considerations can be made regarding another aspect of what we generically call «fictional biography». To avoid confusion, I propose to make a clear distinction between *type a* fictional biographies, i.e. fiction in a biographical form about an unreal character, like *Marbot* (or, in the allodiegetic domain, like Nabokov's *The True Life of Sebastian Knight*), and *type b* fictional biographies, i.e. biographies of real, historical characters but in fictional form (and, in some cases, but not necessarily, with fictional, invented episodes or minor characters). I shall call the *type b* fictional biography *biofiction*, although in France, and in Anglo-American criticism too, this word generally means (confusingly, as I believe) both kinds of text⁵. In *type a* the adjective «fictional» means the predominance of invention on reality, while in *type b* one would probably find more appropriate the expression «fictionalized life», which is underpinned by the pre-existence of a factual account.

Biofictions are, in my vision, titles such as the following:

Georg Büchner, *Lenz*, 1831
 Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Rienzi*, 1835
 Marcel Schwob, *Vies imaginaires*, 1896
 Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Vita di Cola di Rienzo*, 1913
 Robert Graves, *I, Claudius*, 1934
 Thomas Mann, *Lotte in Weimar*, 1938

Hermann Broch, *Der Tod des Vergil*, 1945
 Thornton Wilder, *The Ides of March*, 1948
 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, 1951
 Gore Vidal, *Julian*, 1964
 Anthony Burgess, *Nothing like the Sun*, 1964
 Alberto Arbasino, *Super-Eliogabalo*, 1969
 Mario Tobino, *Biondo era e bello*, 1974
 Anthony Burgess, *Napoleon Symphony*, 1974
 Mario Pomilio, *Il quinto evangelio*, 1975
 Daniele Del Giudice, *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*, 1983
 Mario Pomilio, *Il Natale del 1883*, 1983
 Natalia Ginzburg, *La famiglia Manzoni*, 1983
 Pierre Michon, *Vies minuscules*, 1984
 Sebastiano Vassalli, *La notte della cometa*, 1984
 Peter Ackroyd, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, 1984
 Maria Teresa Giuffrè, *La veglia di Adrasto*, 1986
 Peter Ackroyd, *Chatterton*, 1987
 Pierre Mertens, *Les Éblouissements*, 1987
 Pierre Michon, *Vie de Joseph Roulin*, 1988
 Antonio Tabucchi, *Vagabondaggio*, 1988
 Gérard Macé, *Vies antérieures*, 1991
 Antonio Tabucchi, *Sogni di sogni*, 1992
 J.M. Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg*, 1994
 Antonio Tabucchi, *Gli ultimi tre giorni di Ferdinando Pessoa*, 1994
 Michele Mari, *Io venia pien d'angoscia a rimirarti*, 1990
 Luca Canali, *Nei pleniluni sereni. Autobiografia immaginaria di Tito Lucrezio Caro*, 1995
 Jostein Gaarder, *Vita brevis*, 1996
 Luca Desiato, *Giuliano l'Apostata*, 1997
 Marco Santagata, *Il copista*, 2000
 Joyce Carol Oates, *Blonde*, 2000
 Andrea Camilleri, *Il re di Girgenti*, 2001
 Claudio Magris, *La mostra*, 2001
 Andrea Camilleri, *Biografia del figlio cambiato*, 2001
 Bruno Arpaia, *L'angelo della storia*, 2001
 Michele Mari, *Tutto il ferro della torre Eiffel*, 2002
 David Lodge, *Author, Author*, 2004
 Colm Tóibín, *The Master*, 2004
 Pietro Citati, *La morte della farfalla. Zelda e Francis Scott Fitzgerald*, 2006
 Jean Echenoz, *Ravel*, 2006
 Claudio Magris, *Alla cieca*, 2007
 Jean Echenoz, *Courir*, 2008
 Giuseppe Genna, *Hitler*, 2008
 Wu Ming 4, *La stella del mattino*, 2008
 Aldo Nove, *Si parla troppo di silenzio. Un incontro immaginario tra Edward Hopper e Raymond Carver*, 2009
 Leonardo Colombati, *Il re*, 2009

- Jean Echenoz, *Des éclairs*, 2010
 Michele Mari, *Rosso Floyd*, 2010
 Emmanuele Carrère, *Limonov*, 2011
 Giovanni Montanaro, *Tutti i colori del mondo*, 2011
 Wu Ming 4 – Antar Mohamed, *Timira*, 2012
 Davide Orecchio, *Città distrutte. Sei biografie infedeli*, 2012
 Aldo Nove, *Mi chiamo...*, 2013
 Sandra Petrigiani, *Marguerite*, 2014
 Giuseppe Catozzella, *Non dirmi che hai paura*, 2014
 Marco Santagata, *Come donna innamorata*, 2015
 Antonio Scurati, *Il tempo migliore della nostra vita*, 2015

Now, in biofiction the problem of reference arises in a more symmetrical way than in *Marbot*. Because biofiction is always a ‘palimpsest’, a story that someone has re-written on the basis of a true (or at least possible) biography. When we read such a text we generally assume that the narrated facts (and thoughts) are *true*, or at least likely, plausible, *in spite of* the fictional presentation of them. By «fictional presentation» I mean, at least as a preliminary categorisation, two different kinds of phenomena, depending on a distinctive narrative structure: the choice of the narrative voice⁶.

1) In what I call *heterobiofiction* (paraphrasing the Genette category of *heterodiegesis*), fictional presentation usually implies, among other things, psychological omniscience or other *formal* techniques of representing the third person consciousness which appears intrinsically fictional (free indirect speech, stream of consciousness, etc.); as demonstrated in this example taken from one of the inventors of this genre, Marcel Schwob:

Lucrèce apparut dans une grande famille qui s'était retirée loin de la vie civile. Ses premiers jours reçurent l'ombre du porche noir d'une haute maison dressée dans la montagne. L'atrium était sévère et les esclaves muets. Il fut entouré, dès l'enfance, par le mépris de la politique et des hommes. Le noble Memmius, qui avait son âge, subit, dans la forêt, les jeux que Lucrèce lui imposa. Ensemble, ils s'étonnèrent devant les rides des vieux arbres et épièrent le tremblement des feuilles sous le soleil, comme un voile viride de lumière jonché de taches d'or. Ils considérèrent souvent les dos rayés des pourceaux sauvages qui humaient le sol. Ils

traversèrent des fusées frémissantes d'abeilles et des bandes mobiles de fourmis en marche. Et un jour ils parvinrent, en débouchant d'un taillis, à une clairière tout entourée d'anciens chênes-lièges, si étroitement assis, que leur cercle creusait dans le ciel un puits de bleu. Le repos de cet asile était infini. Il semblait qu'on fût dans une large route claire qui allait vers le haut de l'air divin. Lucrèce y fut touché par la bénédiction des espaces calmes⁷.

2) In what I call *homobiofiction* (and particularly in its elevated form: *autobiofiction*) fictionality is betrayed rather by pragmatic than textual characteristics. In simple words: we have a homobiofiction when the name of the author and the name of the allodiegetic/autodiegetic narrator do not match). So, for instance, at the beginning of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (1951) we read:

Mon cher Marc,
 Je suis descendu ce matin chez mon médecin Hermogène, qui vient de rentrer à la Villa après un assez long voyage en Asie. L'examen devait se faire à jeun: nous avons pris rendez-vous pour les premières heures de la matinée. Je me suis couché sur un lit après m'être dépouillé de mon manteau et de ma tunique. Je t'épargne des détails qui te seraient aussi désagréables qu'à moi-même, et la description du corps d'un homme qui avance en âge et s'apprête à mourir d'une hydropisie du coeur⁸.

In this *autobiofiction* we have a real character (Adrian) but a fictional narrator (Adrian's narrative figure created by a real author, Marguerite Yourcenar, whose name appears on the cover of the book). And then we also have historical facts and minor historical characters (like Hermogenes, the emperor's doctor).

Now, in Yourcenar's biofiction, fictional and factual discourse are both clearly marked because the paratext itself accurately separates invented (that is *fictional*) facts from real (that is *documented*) episodes. At the end of *Les Mémoires d'Hadrien* a long authorial note quotes sources and books and says *explicitly* what is the fruit of the author's invention and what is not. Similarly, the 'classical' form of *heterobiofiction* seems to respect the distinction between facts (true, documented and almost never fictionally altered) and thoughts and feelings, that on the contrary can be (re) created by the author's invention.

Things have been changing quite a lot in the last thirty years. Especially after postmodernism (which did not, however, occupy the whole literary timespan from the Seventies to the Nineties), the distinction between referentiality and fictionality has become increasingly more problematic in biofiction, and we often have a mix of real and unreal characters, invention and reality. In postmodernist biofiction, for instance, very often documentary history is overtly betrayed, like in Coetzee's *Master of Petersburg* (1994), where Dostoevskij survives his son, although in real life Pavel died after Fëdor and not before him. Many other examples could be taken from Italian literature as well, from Tabucchi's *Sogni di sogni* (a collection of fictional dreams by historical characters) to Michele Mari's *Io venìa pien d'angoscia a rimirarti* (a biofiction of the young Leopardi as werewolf...). A typical postmodernist kind of biofiction (but with an important *modernist* forerunner like Bertolt Brecht's *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar...*) represents what I shall call *metabiofiction*: a metabiographical fiction whose focus is less the life of a historical character than the (fictional) account of its writing as well of the difficulty of it (like in Daniele Del Giudice's *Lo stadio di Wimbledon*).

3. Fictionalized lives in the Internet era

But how has biofiction changed in the Internet era? In order to answer this difficult question I need to narrow down my focus to my own field of studies, Italian literature. Over the last 15 years we have seen two different kinds of biofiction. On the one hand, we can observe an updated version of the postmodernist trend, with authors such as Michele Mari (*Tutto il ferro della torre Eiffel*, *Rosso Floyd*) and Alessandro Zaccuri (*Il signor figlio*, another biofiction on Giacomo Leopardi). On the other hand, we have also seen, in the same period, non-postmodernist biofictional works by authors such as Bruno Arpaia (*L'angelo della storia*), Wu Ming (*Timira*), Aldo Nove (*Mi chiamo...*, *Si parla troppo di silenzio*), Leonardo Colombati (*Il re*), Davide Orecchio (*Città distrutte*), Antonio Scurati (*Il tempo migliore della nostra vita*) and many others. These writers seem to handle the problem of referentiality much more carefully than postmodern authors, even though they all use fictional forms of presentation, e.g. psychological omniscience and even more sophisticated devices,

just like their modernist predecessors. For instance, Wu Ming (not the best example from an aesthetic point of view, but certainly the most evident one), state one by one all the sources for their book *Timira* in a final note, just like in *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, with the only difference that they are unable to forget the popular and cinematic character of the New Italian Epic, thus refraining from using the term «Nota al testo» (too old-fashioned...), preferring instead the much cooler «Titoli di coda» (Credits)⁹.

It is my personal opinion that in the postmodernist biofictional production of the last 15 years and in what we may call hypermodernist¹⁰ biofiction, the role of the «mechanic reader» has become extremely important. When I say «mechanic reader» I do not intend the extensive (and also expensive) computer-assisted inter-textual reading proposed by Franco Moretti, but an intensive reading made possible by simple devices that are within everybody's reach: no literary labs with sophisticated equipment but just a laptop, or indeed a smartphone, and, of course, Google or similar search machines. An intensive reading process which exploits not only the *textual* databases of the internet, but also the billions of documents of the most various nature stored on the web.

That is the point we are missing when we are talking about big data. Big data consist not only of texts, words, nouns, adjectives. Big data are also *documents*, and a document can be a text, of course, but it cannot be reduced to only a text. Documents are also *traces*, as the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris put it in his book of 2009: *Documentality: Why it is necessary to leave traces*¹¹. In Ferraris' theory, documents, as records of social acts, are the basis of social reality. As opposed to naive realism, Ferraris' new realism says that (iconic, written, acoustic...) documents make out the social reality we live in, and have done so since words and objects were separated. Unlike in the postmodernist vision, documents are at the same time traces of social objects (for instance an identity document is the trace of my birth) and something that modifies my life (if I do not have an i.d. I cannot access the health care system, for instance). My i.d. is a text, of course, but a very different text from *Anna Karenina*, Beethoven's Ninth and horror movies, all of which are not documents (at least, not primarily).

The double-faced nature of the internet is reflected by in the two kinds of biofiction which have appeared

during the last fifteen years. In the postmodernist vision, the internet seems to embody the idea of a pure intertextuality and looks like a 1:1 scale map of a fully textualized world, ready to be put in a novel. But thanks to the internet a new (hypermodernist) conception of philosophical and even literary realism is taking form and becoming increasingly more self-conscious. In recent postmodernist biofiction the act of reading is based on an intertextual game of allusions that the interaction with the web amplifies and makes steadily broader and more confusing than in the past. Michele Mari's *Rosso Floyd* (2010) for instance, is a kind of oneiric trial without a jury in which dozens of real and fictitious voices testify about the life and mysteries of Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd's legendary first leader. But the voices are so many and diverse that the meaning of that life remains undecipherable. In such texts the mechanical reading is prescribed by the text (or at least required by it, much more so than in the past) in order to reveal the hundreds of intertextual references that the reader, especially if he is not a Pink Floyd fan, would not otherwise understand. Who is Arnold Layne? Is there an Italian Pink Floyd fan club whose president's name is Marzio Acquaviva? Did Stanley Kubrick originally plan to ask the band to do the soundtrack for *2001: Space Odyssey*, as his fictional avatar says on p. 36? I confess that when I read hybrid texts like this I cannot resist verifying the consistency of the facts, checking them via Google or other relevant sources. This intertextual game can be highly sophisticated. Let us for instance take this (false although probable) letter by psychiatrist Ronald Laing which certifies Barrett's mental illness and is quoted on page 29 of the book:

Londra, 18 luglio 1967.

Esaminato da me in due distinte occasioni a istanza dei signori Peter Jenner e Andrew King, il soggetto Roger Keith Barrett di anni 21 ha manifestato una condizione di grave disturbo mentale, attribuibile con ogni probabilità, in attesa dei necessari esami clinici, ad abuso reiterato di dietilamide dell'acido lisergico, più noto come LSD. [...] ¹²

This letter is a fake. Realistic, plausible, but a fake. If we type «Syd Barrett» and «Ronald Laing» on Google we find an article from «The Guardian» online of 6th October 2002 that says that such an encounter, although planned, never happened:

In the spring of 1968, Roger Waters had talked to the hip psychiatrist RD Laing. He had even driven Barrett to an appointment: 'Syd wouldn't get out. What can you do?' In the intervening months, however, Barrett became less hostile to the idea of treatment. So [David] Gale placed a call to Laing and Po [Aubrey Powell] booked a cab. But with the taxi-meter ticking outside, Barrett refused to leave the flat¹³.

And maybe we can also assume that Mari got the idea for that meeting after having read this article: if this is true, the false (fictional) document took the form from a real one, but reversing its meaning. What matters to Mari is indeed to generate a chain reaction of intertexts.

In hypermodern fiction, on the contrary, the act of reading is not a pure intertextual game, and the internet is more than a limitless encyclopaedia. Let us take once again *Timira* by Wu Ming 2 and Antar Mohamed. Not a masterwork, in my opinion, but a good example of the general mood and of the new mainstream, also because Wu Ming is a group of anonymous writers born at the very beginning of the internet era, initially bearing the collective name of Luther Blisset. They were among the first Italian writers who were able to create and manage a web site, to use the net as a means to spread their artistic and political ideas, to keep in touch with their readers via new technologies. Their books are also freely accessible on the internet in electronic editions, while also being listed in catalogues as paper books.

Timira tells the story of Isabella Marincola, a woman born in Somalia under the fascist regime of an Italian father and a Somali mother. The interaction between literature and documentary here goes much further than mere intertextuality: the site of the Wu Ming Foundation started to talk about the book some months before its publication, spreading documents in the form of texts, videos, internet links and other material. These so called «Preludi» are still accessible and can now be read also as virtual appendixes to the book, augmenting its documentary value. Thus we have a video interview with Isabella, links to books about the history of her brother (the only black partisan of the Italian Resistance) and so on¹⁴. Challenging postmodernist undecidability, this New Italian Epic, sometimes in naïve form, proposes a new «impegno», a renovated idea of civil participation and by the same token a re-

vised idea of realism (a documentary realism, as Raffaele Donnarumma puts it). Other non-postmodernist (or hypermodernist) Italian writers, such as Davide Orecchio, have been experimenting with much more sophisticated and aesthetically much more interesting forms of documentary (biographical) fiction. The new kind of reader these writings presuppose is a more conscious one: but he is not necessarily a cultured reader in the humanist tradition (in other words: the ideal reader of the *Mémoires d'Hadrien*), but someone who is able to knowingly use information technology to interpret the new hybrid texts of our hybrid times.

Notes

- ¹ J.P. Stern, *Sweet Sin*, in «London Review of Books», vol. 4, n. 14, 5 (August 1982), pp. 3-6.
- ² W. Hildesheimer, *Letter to the Editor*, «London Review of Books», vol. 4, n. 17 (16 September 1982).
- ³ W. Hildesheimer, *Marbot. A Biography* [1981], English translation by P. Crampton, London & Melbourne, Dent 1983, p. 53 (italics are mine).
- ⁴ D. Cohn, «Breaking the Code of Fictional Biography. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Marbot*», in Ead., *The Distinction of Fiction*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press 1991, p. 69-91.
- ⁵ To my knowledge, the word «biofiction» was coined in 1991 by the French critic Alain Buisine (A. Buisine *Biofictions*, «Re-

vue des Sciences Humaines» («Le Biographique»), vol. 4, n. 224, 1991, pp. 7-13). In many cases (see for instance *The Ides of March*) it is difficult to distinguish a biofiction from a historical novel. We can say that, in general, in biofiction the focus is on the life of the historical character, while in historical novels what really matters is the context.

- ⁶ In the following I shall give a quick overview of a more detailed typology which I shall go on to describe in greater detail in a forthcoming article for the French journal «Communications».
- ⁷ M. Schwob, *Vies imaginaires* [1896], Paris, Flammarion 2004, p. 59.
- ⁸ M. Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien suivi de Carnets de notes de «Mémoires d'Hadrien»* [1951], Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 11.
- ⁹ Wu Ming, Antar Mohamed, *Timira. Romanzo meticcio*, Torino, Einaudi 2012.
- ¹⁰ The term hypermodernism has recently been introduced in Italian criticism by Raffaele Donnarumma to describe and interpret the narrative prose of the last twenty years (*Ipermodernità. Dove va la narrativa contemporanea*, Bologna, il Mulino 2014). According to Donnarumma, in the last two decades hypermodernism has substituted postmodernism as the dominant poetic genre in Italian literature.
- ¹¹ M. Ferrari, *Documentalità. Perché è necessario lasciar tracce*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 2009. The idea of documentality has also been discussed in a literary perspective by Donnarumma.
- ¹² M. Mari, *Rosso Floyd*, Torino, Einaudi 2010, p. 29.
- ¹³ T. Willis, *You shone like the sun*, The Guardian», 6 October 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/06/biography.music>
- ¹⁴ [Http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/?p=7036](http://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/?p=7036).