

**A NEW HISTORICIST STUDY OF YAKUBU MUKHTAR'S  
*MUSA DAGGASH: THE STORY OF A SHUWA ARAB BOY*  
AND DAHIRU COOMASIE AND MUHAMMED SANI'S  
*INTEGRITY AND SERVICE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF*  
*AHMADU COOMASIE***

**BY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT  
OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES, BAYERO  
UNIVERSITY KANO, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH (LITERATURE)**

**JUNE 2019**

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been researched and written by me. It has also not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree either in Bayero University Kano or any other university. All quotations are indicated by quotation marks or indentation and sources of information duly acknowledged by means of bibliography.

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## CERTIFICATION

This dissertation by Asma’u Mohammed Bello has met the requirements for the award of Degree of Master of Arts in English (Literature) of Bayero University Kano, Nigeria, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my mentor, Mohammed Bello Umar

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

All praise belongs to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful and Master of the Day of Judgment. May His peace and blessings be upon the noble Prophet, Muhammad (S.A.W).

I wish to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Isma'il Abubakar Tsigafor the guidance and endless assistance he rendered that led to the production of this work. May Allah reward you abundantly, Amin. With immense gratitude and pleasure, I will like to thank Dr. Raliya Maijama'a Abdullahi who spent days going through the manuscripts making a constructive input, leading to its present standard.

Special thanks to all the staff in the Department of English and Literary Studies for their dedication and fairness in the discharge of their duties. Special mention must be made of the Head of Department, Dr. Rabi Abdulsalam Ibrahim. I am also indebted to Professors Ibrahim Bello Kano, Mustapha Mohammed, Aliyu Kamal and Saidu Babura Ahmad. Your wealth of experience and expertise is indeed exemplary. I am also grateful to Dr. Amina Adamu, your critical contributions have always been inspiring.

To my children, Muntaka, Khadija, Ahmad, Asmau (Nana) and Umar, I pray that Allah will continue to bless you. I really appreciate your patience and prayers throughout the period of my study.

My mates, especially Tachia Nicholas, and Esther Buba, it is really nice and memorable staying with you all. God bless!

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the way the life of the subjects of a biography is portrayed and celebrated in Coomassie and Sani's *Integrity and Service: The Life and Times of Ahmadu Coomassie* and Mukhtar's *Musa Daggash: The Story of a Shuwa Arab Boy*. The work argues through a New Historicist approach that biographical accounts generally are devoid of objectivity. Focusing on the ideological perspectives through which the subjects are presented to the reader in the texts, this dissertation argues that in as much as a biographer may attempt to represent the life of his subject with considerable accuracy, his proclivity of the subject controls his narrative so that it is his own version of the subject that the readers grasp in the work. The analysis of the primary texts demonstrates the ways in which the biographical subject is essentially a product of the biographer's own perception. This being the case, this dissertation concludes that while it is possible to adopt biography as a means of celebrating life against death, the biographer is implicated in the biography more so when he is a relative or friend of the biographical subject. The argument is that the primary texts more or less eulogises since their scope does not include every aspect of their subjects' lives.



## CHAPTER ONE; INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Biography, which is one of the oldest forms of literature, has attracted attention for several years, largely because of its qualities of history and literary craftsmanship. It combines the twin properties of storytelling and preserving the personal history of the subject. This feature distinguishes it in documenting known personalities whether dead or alive, who had stood out in their communities, even as it provides the lessons for future generations to copy. These qualities have also endeared biography to modern literary critics, as they figure out its properties from various perspectives, especially as a literary form whose impact extends well beyond the written text.

Thus, in the “Introduction” to *Biography: Writing Lives* (2002), Parke argues that, regardless of the popularity of biography and the transformation it has gone through in human history as a literary form, “the primary urges to celebrate, commemorate and immortalise, the impulse of life against death, have continued to be among the chief motives for writing lives” (25). For all these motives, however, biography is a created work, whose final identity and effect are determined by its craftsmanship. As Lomask (1986) argues, “A biography is not a compilation of factsts” life, detailing his conflict and struggles with himself, “or with the world around him, or with both”.

Against the backdrop of these assertions, this work aims to study two books that record the history of two outstanding personalities from northern Nigeria, Alhaji Musa Daggash and Alhaji Ahmadu Coomasie; both of them career civil servants who built a reputation for hard work in the service of the people. Their lives are individually documented in Yakubu Mukhtar’s *Musa Daggash: The Story of A Shuwa Arab Boy*; and Coomasie and Sani’s *Integrity and Service: The Life and Times of Ahmadu Coomasie*.

The aim of the dissertation is to explore the popular arguments of contemporary scholars concerning the purpose of biography and the literary and ideological tools normally deployed in its construction. For, as Keen (2015: 24) argues:

Life writing introduces us to universals of experience in spite of every kind of human difference which biographies, memoirs, autobiographies and works of testimonies strongly and variously represent. Allowing oneself to engage with a written life, even one radically different from us in identity and experience, links us with our kin, by which I mean only all of the rest of those unique story-telling animals-humankind.

Consequently, a New Historicist assessment of the text is undertaken to demonstrate to unravel the ideological perspectives that guide the authors in the re-creation of their subjects as a means of celebrating life after death. This is based on New Historicism understanding of history as represented in text. It is against this backdrop that the study investigates the ideological tropes that guide the authors representation of their subjects.

## **1.2A Brief on the Authors**

### **1.2.1 Yakubu Mukhtar**

Yakubu Mukhtar, the author of *Musa Daggash: The Story of a Shuwa Arab Boy* was born in Nguru, Yobe State. He studied at the University of Maiduguri and the school of Oriental and African studies, (University of London). Since 1983, he has been a staff of the University of Maiduguri, where he is a senior lecturer. Besides serving on a number of national committees, he has published a number of articles and chapters in numerous journals and books. He is also the author of *Trade, Merchant and the State in Borno* (Mukhtar, 2000: Blurb).

### **1.2.2 Dahiru Coomassie**

The authors of *Integrity and Service: the life and times of Ahmadu Coomassie* are Dahiru Coomassie and Muhammad K. Sani. Dahiru Ahmadu Coomassie was born on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of January 1954 in Zaria. He attended Kaduna Capital School, Government Secondary School, Katsina, St. John's College, Kaduna and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where he graduated in Sociology in 1977. After completing the mandatory one year National Service, he joined Ahmadu Bello University as a Researcher at the Center for Nigerian Cultural Studies. He was also the treasurer of the Ahmadu Bello University branch of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). In 1985, he resigned his appointment and moved back to Katsina to take care of his aged father. After his father's death in 1989, he took up an appointment with Today Communication Limited, publishers of *Today*, *Abuja Mirror* and *A Yau* (vernacular newspaper). He was the editor of *Today* from 1990 to 2000, after which he became the company's Managing Director/Editor-in-chief. He was also the general secretary of the Nigerian Guild of Editors. Dahiru Coomassie was a director of several companies including, Nigerian Sewing Machine Manufacturing Company Plc (SINGER), Carnco Foods Nig. Ltd, NUB International Bank Limited, Katsina Flour Mills, and Arewa Integrated Farms Limited.

Married with 5 children, Mr. Coomassie resides in Kaduna (Coomassie and Sani, 2008: Blurb).

### **1.2.3 Muhammad K. Sani**

Muhammad Kabir Sani was born in 1958 in Dutsimma, Katsina State. He attended Arabic Teachers College Katsina and the College of Education Kafanchan for the National Certificate of Education (NCE). Thereafter, he enrolled in Bayero University, Kano and graduated with a Second Class Upper degree in Islamic Studies. A Fellow of the Institute of Corporate Executives of Nigeria (FICEN), he has taught at all levels – from Nursery to the Tertiary. He has also held positions as Headmaster, College Principal, and Assistant Director of Education in the Katsina

State Ministry of Education. For many years, he was the chairman of the Association of Nigerian Authors, Katsina branch. He is a trained speech writer and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Administration. Muhammad Kabir Sani enjoys reading, discussing current affairs, writing, sports, travelling and philanthropy. He has visited all the states in Nigeria as well as many countries, such as Togo, Ghana, Benin Republic, Niger, Egypt, Cameroon and Saudi Arabia. He is married with nine children music (Coomasie and Sani, 2008: Blurb).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The death of a loved one is one of the most harrowing experiences a person can go through. Consequently, several methods are usually adopted as ways of celebrating the life of a loved one. Many take to writing to express their fond memories of the dead as a way of preserving such a life against death. This makes up the primary goal of a biographer. Biographers seek to recreate the life of someone that has a personal significance to them and try to project such attributes they feel are capable of inculcating meaningful decorum in the reader. Thus biographies are written as a celebration of the life of a person whom the biographer has found laudable and admirable. The biographer sees this as an opportunity to get to the heart of what really matters so that future generations can live their lives well by learning through the life of his subject. The central problem of this study is to investigate the extent to which the biographer's own context influences his documentation of the life of his subject; and whether, indeed it is possible that what he ends up preserving is not in fact the life of the subject of his writing, but his own perspective of that life. That is to say, how is the writer himself inscribed in the writing; and is it possible that the writing subject overshadows the written subject in a biography?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

A biographer seeks to portray the unfolding of life with all its cross-currents of interests, changing emotional states and events. Yet, in order to avoid reproducing the confusion and a clutter of actual daily existence, he must interrupt the flow of time and group his materials so as to reveal traits of personality, grand themes of existence and actions and attitudes leading to moment of high decision. His achievement as a biographer will be measured in great part, by his ability to suggest the sweep of chronology and yet to highlight the major patterns of behaviour that gives a life meaning and shape (Hughes, 2009: 159).

The significance of this study is that it will critically examine the way the life of the subjects is portrayed and celebrated in the primary texts. The study unravels the ideological inclinations of the authors in the representation of the life of his subject. The study underscore the subjectivity the characterise biographers while representing the life of their subjects. This contrasts biographers' claim of an objective portrayal of their subjects' lives.

## **1.5 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to make an exploration into the popular arguments of contemporary scholars concerning the purpose of biography and the literary and ideological tools deployed to its construction. The objectives of the study are to:

- i. determine the extent to which the selected texts have been able to recreate the life of the subjects as a celebration of life against death.
- ii. show that biography can be a useful tool in the preservation and re-creation of life against death.

- iii. ascertain that the selected texts have been able to re-create the life of their subjects accordingly.
- iv. to undertake a New Historicist evaluation of the selected texts to in order to see its relevance in the representation of subjects in life writing.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following questions:

- i. to what extent is the writer of the biography inscribed in the writing?
- ii. in what ways can biography be regarded as a veritable material for the celebration and preservation of life against death?
- iii. to what extent have the selected texts been able to celebrate the lives of their subjects against death?

## **1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This study focuses on the biographers' attempt at recreating the lives of their subjects as a means of celebrating life against death. It investigates the extent to which the primary texts have been able to celebrate the life of their subjects while trying to immortalise their successes. The study is therefore, desk-work oriented and involves no field work, interviews or questionnaires.

## **1.8 Research Methodology**

This study is critical, analytical, and historical. It is purely a library research. Consequently, materials such as books, journals, newspapers, published and unpublished essays, conference papers, theses and dissertations are painstakingly going to be used for the study. The materials are obtained from both public and private libraries as well as the internet.

## 1.9 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted as a tool for this study is New Historicism. New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. It has its roots in a reaction to the "New Criticism" of formal analysis of works of literature, which was seen by a new generation of professional critics as ignoring the greater social and political consequences of the production of literary texts. New Historicism developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic Stephen Greenblatt, gained widespread influence in the 1990s and beyond (Vesser 1989: 152).

According to Greenblatt (1980:75), from the mid 1800s to the mid twentieth century, historical methods of literary analysis were erroneous. According to Bressler (2003:181), during this period, many scholars believed that history served as background information for textual analysis and that historians were able to objectively reproduce a given historical period and state "how it really was". Greenblatt (1980) therefore, developed new historicism as a direct result of New Criticism's dominance of literary criticism and its lack of response to questions concerning the nature, the definition and the function of literature itself. Thus, New Historicism as championed by Greenblatt assumes that language shapes and is shaped by the culture that uses it. For the New Historical critics, language includes discourse, writing, literature, social actions, and any social relationship whereby a person or a group impose their ideas or actions upon another. Also included in this definition of language is history. According to New Historical critics, like literature, writing or any other relationships that involve either a transfer or some other relationships of power, history now becomes a narrative discourse and that history like literature,

must now be viewed as a language that can never be fully articulated or completely explained, new Historicists thus, see history and literature as synonymous terms, both being narrative discourses that interact with their present-day cultures. Accordingly, New Historicists argue that neither of these can claim a complete or an objective understanding of its content or historical situation, for both are ongoing conversations with their creators, readers and cultures.

New Historicists also view an aesthetic work as a social production. For them, a text's meaning resides in the cultural system composed of the interlocking discourses of its author the text and its readers. To unlock textual meaning New Historical critic investigates three areas of concern: the life of the author, the social rules and dictates found within a text and a reflection of a work's historical situation as evidenced in the text. They believe that since an actual person authors a text, his or her actions and beliefs reflect both individual concerns and those of the author's society and are essential elements of the text's itself.

New Historicism therefore, assert that an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object- a text or any work of art and society, while denying that a text can be evaluated in isolation from its cultural context. New Historicists thus declare that the societal concerns of the author, of the historical times evidenced in the work and other cultural elements exhibited in the text before one can devise a valid interpretation.

A New Historicist view literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected that work and how the work reflects the writer's times thereby recognising how the cultural context colours that critic's conclusions. New Historicists acknowledge that the critic's examination of literature is tainted by his own culture and environment. They aim simultaneously to understand the work through its historical context and to understand culture as well as to investigate the intellectual history and cultural history through literature. New

Historicism is also known to often challenge the concept of truth and the notion of rationality. Modern thinkers such as held that reason is a universal faculty of the mind that is free of interpretation and that is capable of grasping universal and unchanging truth. New Historicists question this notion of rationality and truth and argue for the historical context of knowledge.

Tyson (2006:174) states that “historians may believe they are being objective but their own views of what is right and wrong, what is civilised and uncivilised, what is important and unimportant and the like will strongly influence the ways in which they interpret events”.

According to New Historicists history cannot be understood simply as a linear progression of events –that at any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others. They therefore believe that we cannot understand a historical event, object, or person in isolation from the web of discourses in which it was represented because we cannot understand it in isolation from the meanings it carried at that time. The more we isolate it, the more we will tend to view it through the meanings of our own time and place and perhaps, our own desire to believe that the human race is important with the passage of time.

New Historicism is based on the idea that we know history only in its textual form, that is, in the form of the documents, written statistics, legal codes, diaries, letters, speeches, tracts, news articles and the like in which are recorded the attitudes, policies, procedures and events that occurred in a given time and place. That is, even when historians base their findings on the kinds of primary sources listed above, rather than on the interpretations of other historians, those primary sources are almost always in the form of some sort of writing. As such, they require the same kinds of analyses literary critics perform on literary texts (Barry 2002:144, Tyson 2006: 178).

In addition, New Historicists claim that historical analysis is unavoidably subjective and is not an attempt to legitimise a self-indulgent attitude toward the writing of history. Rather, the inevitability of personal bias makes it imperative that New Historicists be as aware of and as forthright as possible about their own psychological and ideological positions relative to the material they analyse so that their readers can have some idea of the human lens through which they are viewing the historical issues at hand. Therefore, New Historicism acknowledges and embraces the idea that as times changes, so will our understanding.

According to Barry (2002: 144), New Historicism can simply be seen as a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. This means that New Historicism refuses to privilege the literary text. Instead, as Barry notes, “a literary foreground and a historical (sic), it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other”. The tone of New Historicism and its ambition as summed by Barry (2002:145), is about reading literature within the “archival continuum” as is vividly encapsulated in the method.

Thus, New Historicism is noted to be interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents in history as text. Historical events as such, it would argue, are irrecoverably lost. This emphasis bears the influence of the long familiar view in literary studies that the actual thoughts or feelings or intention of a writer can never be recovered or reconstructed, so that the real living individual is now entirely superseded by the literary text which has come down to us. As it were, “the word of the past replaces the world of the past”. Since for the New Historicists, the events and attitudes of the past now exist solely as writing, it makes sense to subject that writing to the kind of close analysis formerly reserved for literary texts (Barry,2002: 145).

To some extent, New Historicism in this view, seems to accept Derrida's view that there is nothing outside of the text, in the special sense that everything about the past is only available to us in textualised form through the ideology, outlook or discursive practices of its own time, then through those of ours and finally through the distorting web of language itself since they argue, "whatever that is represented in a text is thereby remade". This notion agrees with Louis Montrose's famous definition that New Historicism "centres upon the historicity of the text and the textuality of history" (Quoted in Barry 2002:145).

To Tyson (2006), New Historicism seeks to find out how events in a particular historical source are presented by the writer and what this event tells us about the interpreters. Tyson therefore declared that New Historicism confine itself largely to studies of the author's life, in order to discover his or her intensions in writing the work or to studies of the historical period in which the work was written in order to reveal the spirit of the age which the text was then shown to embody.

This is the direction with which the study finds the New Historical approach more apt as it seeks to investigate the biographers' perspective in presentation of their subjects. This is more so, as Tyson (2006) states that literary texts as viewed by New Historicism are cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which the text was written.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The importance of literature review in any study is critical for any academic study. This importance was highlighted more lucidly by a British philosopher and scientist, Isaac Newton who states that if “I have seen far, it is not because my sight is better than others but because I stood on the shoulders of giants” (cited in Ada, Nicholas et al 2004). The uniqueness of this section is indeed based on the grounds that the entire study will gain support from the views and dialectics of scholars in the field. The scholarly exercise that has already been done in the area would help the study in attempting a valid conclusion at the end of the study.

### **2.2 On Life Writing**

According to Saunders (2008:11), life writing is “non-fiction writing on subjects of personal experience and observation; it includes autobiography, biography, memoir, personal essay, travel and sojourn writings”. When we do life writing, we are using our memory and using our powers to describe and tell a story in a certain manner which shows our creativity. It is made up of different texts which include fictional and non-fictional ones which are connected by a common theme: “self” or “life”. Almost everything is life writing since it is a combination of different genres. Most of all, life writing has proved to be such a wonderful tool since it has the ability to increase the development and growth of a person (Saunders, 2008:12).

Kadar (1992:29) discusses the genre of life writing as a “genre of documents or fragments of documents written out of life or unabashedly out of personal experience of the writer”. It comprises texts which are fictional and non-fictional which are linked by “a thematic concern of life or self”.

Green (2008:2) writes that “Life writing extends the field of literature, covering what used to be thought of as autobiography or biography. She explains that it is an open term that more adequately expresses the crossing and blurring of the traditional generic borders of autobiography, biography and fiction, and the different ways of inscribing the self in literature. Life writing is the construction of a narrative, and narrative is the “quintessential form of customary knowledge.” According to Green, the narrative of a life enables a writer or reader to better understand themselves and their relationship to their world. She therefore defines life writing as “the shaping and constructing of a life, which necessarily draws on both fact and fiction, generating effects of reality and truth”. In the light of this, life writing can be seen as a site of struggle in the representation of a life and self, and is empowering because it enacts the authority to broaden and disrupt the traditional generic framing of texts. The knowledge that life is narratable, carrying with it a compulsion to be told, allows for an understanding of our values, our selves, and our world.

Green (2008:50) however, argues that as a discourse on the self, it is impossible to fix a meaning to life writing since the self is always shifting and multiple. Derrida (1992:221) describes the self as a “living principle, disrupting the status of the written text, transgressing such genres as autobiography, biography, fiction and history; and so hybrid selves are translated into hybrid writing”. Green (2008:50) opines that if stories or narratives are the only ways we can understand ourselves and our world, if “people don’t see the world before their eyes until it’s put in narrative mode, then the narrative of a life – life writing, and the writing of one’s own life may be the fundamental ways in which the writer can both inscribe and access subjectivity”. Elbaz (1988:154) believes that by making the self into an object, which he calls “spatializing the self,” we are able to understand our own stories and therefore our life. Life writing, to some extent, is the conferring of an identity on ourselves; it is a controlling, ordering and possessing of one’s

life through the language of narrative. Behabib (1996:374) writes that “we are who we are, or the ‘I’ that we are, by means of a narrative”. According to Roland Barthes in Abbot (2002:11) “narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative ... it is simply there, like life itself”.

Abbot (2002: 11) says that life writing can be understood as an aesthetic of consciousness; a discourse of subjectivity distinguished through its textual reciprocity and its self-reflexive struggle to represent a unique interior life. He opines that whether this narration of consciousness is motivated by desire, anxiety, threats to selfhood or alienation, there is a fundamental awareness in life writing of the essential narratability of a self and life and that it demands to be told. Lee (2009:1) argues that the term “life writing also includes memoir, personal essay, autobiography, biography, diary, journalism, letters, blogs and even fiction” she held that the purpose of life writing is “when the distinction between biography and autobiography is being deliberately blurred”.

However, critics use the word “auto/biography” to talk about both genres – autobiography and biography together, it was the period of romanticism when the perspective started to emerge that all the writings include dimensions of autobiography. Therefore, the distinction between autobiography and other forms of life writing has always been blurred. According to Saunders a memoir of someone else by virtue of the fact that you are writing about them because they are important in your life, will be part of your autobiography. He continues that scholars are also immersing their lives in biographies of others in order to tell us something about their lives in biography. Their writings are displaced and therefore, it became the mixture of “fictionality”.

Contemporary trends in life writing include political autobiographies, celebrity’s biography and survivor memoir. We see the trends of life writing not only in the texts but also on television and

internet as well. We are able to do life writing on internet through the usage of my space, blog, documentaries and even facebook. It is also popular because of reality shows that basically involve aspects of life writing. The connection that we see between reality shows and life writing is that both are very personal and it is dealing with someone's life.

Progoff (1975:28) notices that there are positive effects of life writing such as biography, autobiography and journalistic writing since it can enhance personal growth and learning. It also has the ability to enhance individual's thinking, develops their feelings and also helps to bring confidence especially with people who have low self-esteem. Also by recording our memories, we can lower our risks of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer.

Life writing enables family information as well as emotions and feelings about history to be remembered. For example, through life writing we are given opportunity to pass down our family traditions and culture. This can also be the reason that people are more interested in life writing. Autobiography and biography have attracted attention among literary critics in recent years as distinct genres of life writing because of their dual identities in the world of literature and social history. Tsiga (2010:11) argues that these dual identities had created confusion in the past concerning their actual status. He submitted that the "confusion has now been cleared away" as the identity of autobiography and biography became firmly established as works of literature; narratives in which the act of writing the "self" is accorded the greatest significance.

However, Olney (1980:19) argues that "one always feels that there is a great and present danger that the subject will slip away altogether. That it will vanish into thinnest air, leaving behind the perception that there is no heel as a literary genre with its own proper form, terminology and observation"

Bello-Kano (2009:51) maintains that “since a life cannot write itself in a biography, it means that the writer, biographer, has necessarily to aspire to write up a sequence of facts about another life”. He argued that biography is a kind of written, narrated, patterned persona or life, and in such a ideal state that biography can be referred to as “life writing” because it is through the process of writing that the “grapher” presents and represents the “bio” (life) and turned it into literature (text).

### **2.3 The Concept of Biography**

The word biography is coined from two Greek words, *bio* meaning *life* and *graphi* which means *writing*. It therefore, literally means life writing. It simply refers to an account of someone by another person. According to *The New World Encyclopedia* (1979), biography means a narrative or a story that relates the key events and facts about a person’s perspective. *The Oxford Dictionary* (2015) states that the writer of a biographical narrative describes the events in a chronological or logical sequence and reflects upon their significance. Biographers use descriptive details to expand upon and explain shifts in the person’s perspective.

According to Possing (2009:2) biography is a reconstruction of a human life, and a representation of an historical individual. Possing argues that the notion of biography encompasses more than a pure life depiction. It encompasses both “the events of a life, the narrative of a life, and the interpretation of its characteristics”. According to her, biography represents one of many ways of telling history. She states that traditionally, biography places the individual at the center of the narrative, instead of larger analysis of dynamics, structures and events. As such, she sees biograph as been a controversial genre within the scholarly writing of history for centuries.

Biography is a genre characterised by variety and diversity, both in historical outlook, media and methodology, and in a cornucopia of categories and forms. In terms of genre, Possing (2009:2) maintains that:

Biography verges on autobiography, literary biography, the traditional tale, the life story, and the biographical novel. In specialist professional terms, the biography verges psychology, sociology, anthropology, history and literature. In terms of protagonist, the historical biography is open to everyone and anyone, statesmen and farmers, generals and artists, philosophers and scientists, heroes and villains, women and men.

As regards time-scale, Possing argues that biography has existed since the antiquity, and up to the present and that this makes it an extremely complex and deeply fascinating genre. In corroboration with Possing, it can be seen that in present times, biography is a multimedia phenomenon from the highest academic publications in different disciplines to the popular journalist biography, and the electronic life stories of the entertainment industry. It diverges from fiction, but in its narrative form it shares genre with the modern novel, which has long since broken with linear narrative in recognition that the passage of real life is fragmented.

A biographical narrative contains biological information, physical descriptions, action details, anecdotes and personal interpretations of the biographer about the subject. Authors of biographical narrative typically choose people or characters that have personal significance to them. The point and direction of the narrative outlines the personal impact the subject has in the author's life. Kendall (2015:159) states that in a biographical narrative, the author highlights certain details to develop an in-depth impression of the person. He further notes that "sensory details replace direct explanations- the author creates an emotional impact with the narrative using specific and highly descriptive words and phrases. Thoughts and summaries expand upon the details and emphasise the turning points in the narrative. Personal perspective is a key aspect of a biographical narrative: "The thoughts of the author relate the turning point of the subject to

their own life throughout the narrative” (Kendall, 2015:159). The introduction and conclusion of a biographical narrative tie the elements of the story together and summarise the overall meaning.

Biography therefore, is a detailed account of an individual’s life; a text that lends itself to different modes of expression and construction. In the context of intercultural language learning, the concept of biography can be considered in relation to identity over time and to the understanding that language is involved in the shaping and expression of identity (Casper, 1999:81). It is the story of the life of an individual as written and patterned by another individual. It is more than a list of impersonal facts like education, work, relationship and death but also a “portraiture of the subject’s story highlighting the various aspects of his/her life including intimate details of experiences and may include analyses of the subject’s personality” (Kendall, 2015:160). This means that in a biographical narrative, the information is not firsthand as opposed to autobiographies, rather a lot is depended on other sources like historical documents, interviews, family archives and the point of view is external to the subject.

Biographies therefore chronicle a person’s life, starting with the subject’s beginning, continuity until his death or the present day. And when the subject is still living, such a biography will be incomplete” (Malcolm cited in “Sylvia Plat...”Par.1). He further argues that some biographers only include a specific time period in the person’s life or just touch on what a person has nobly done to a movement, a course or history of a people. Biography more typically focuses upon a single human being and deals with the particulars of that person’s life.

According to Casper (1999:81), biographies are classified into two: biographies written from personal knowledge of the subject and those written based on research. The former is also referred to as firsthand knowledge biography. This often represents a conjunction of two main

biographical forces: a desire on the part of the writer to preserve the earthly pilgrimage of a man and awareness that he has the special qualifications because of direct observation and access to personal papers to undertake such a task. This kind of biography is one form or another to be found in most of the cultures that preserve any kind of written biographical tradition and it is commonly to be found in all ages from the earliest literatures to the present. In its first manifestations, it was often produced based upon the recollections of the disciples of a religious figure such as the biographical fragments concerning Buddha, portions of the Old Testament and the Christian gospels. It is sometimes called “source biography” (Casper (1999:81) because it preserves original materials, the testimonies of the biographer and often intimate papers of the subject

Research biographies on the other hand, are the accounts of an individual that results from research rather than firsthand knowledge by a biographer. It has several forms. They are made up of informative biographies, critical biographies, standard biography, interpretative biography, fictionalised biography, and special purpose biographies. Despite its varied forms, “the aim of all biographies is chiefly to recreate in words the life of a human being as understood from the historical or personal perspective of the author” (Lomask 1986:2). However, Lee (2009:11) insists that biography can better be written when the biographer had known the subject personally. According to her this idea was firmly upheld by renowned scholars like “Dr Johnson and his biographer Boswell”.

According to Lee (2009:5), “biography is the story of a person told by someone else”. Lee further notes that biography is “story” because to her, it is “a form of narrative, not just a presentation of facts”. In the view of Lee expressed here, biography can never be seen as even an account of someone because it is replete with flattery, idealisation, flatness, inaccuracy and

distortions. This view is accurate as the biographer makes the reader look dependent on him in his persuasive technique to portray his subject. And in the bid to achieve his aim of celebrating such a life, the biographer may be overwhelmed by eulogy and sometimes flattery that are meant to deify his subject for the reader to learn from.

Biographies are rendered in many different forms which also involve an oral dimension such as recounting of memories, witness-testimony, much-repeated anecdotes (Lee, 2009:5). However, whichever form a biography is presented, the central idea in biographies is to celebrate the life of a particular person who had lived an outstanding life in the society so as to contribute a meaningful knowledge to others. Consequently, Lomask (1986:1) argues that a biographer while gathering his materials uses the quasi-scientific methods as a historical researcher and employs same techniques as a fiction writer. According to Lomask (1986:1):

...a biographer needs a central tension around which the material you assemble can be organized so as to leave in the mind of the reader some dominant impression or statement, some major themes with which the subsidiary theme resonates, to which they contribute even as small streams contribute to the making of a river.

Lomask therefore argues further that “a biography is not a compilation of facts but a portrait in words of a man or woman in conflict with himself or with the world around him or with both”. In support of Lomask (1986), Lee (2009:3) states that “a contrasting metaphor for biography is the portrait”. She notes that the portraitist portraying life stimulates warmth, energy, idiosyncrasy and personality through attention to detail and skill in representation. She submits that biographers frequently use portraiture as an image for what they are doing. And by so doing, they are able to capture “the vital spark of the human subject”.

Parke (2009: xiii) argues that biography as a literary genre needs no “explanation, analysis and justification”. According to her biography, tells the stories of our lives, combining the solid

satisfaction of facts with the shaping pleasures of the imagination. This is even as she argues further that:

We are born, live and die in a world where events follow event. Biography narrates life, plotting the circle of existence from birth to death. As secretary to our existence, biography might seem to have a self evident poetics, a poetics inseparable from the genre, beyond words other than its own (xiii).

Parke's assertion from the foregoing also explains the primary role and function of biography. A biography serves in the light of the above as a recorder of human existence to the moment of death. While Parke is explicit to state that biographies end at the moment of death, Lee (2009:2) contemplates autopsy; a forensic examination of the dead body which takes place when the cause of death is unusual, suspicious or ambiguous as part of the biographic realm. According to Lee, the metaphor of autopsy invokes biography as a process of posthumous scrutiny, applied to a helpless subject from whom life or the soul has gone". Lee posits however, that even though the process cannot injure the person who is no longer there but it can certainly change our posthumous view of them, depending on what is ascertained from the examination. She therefore concludes that "since an autopsy can have nothing or little to say about the subject's thoughts, intelligence, emotions, temperament, talents or beliefs, it may not even be able to conclusively prove the cause of death". What Lee seems to be saying here is that however relevant an autopsy may be in a biographical narrative, it is not critical of the subject's historical account but provides momentary information about the cause of his death. Accordingly, Lee may be missing a point here since she herself insists that the hallmark of a biographic writing is to "teach us how to live our lives or can open our minds to lives very unlike our own" (Lee 2009:2). Therefore, if biography is to undertake such a noble task, the result of an autopsy can provide a useful message to others to live a life conscious of avoiding such a death which is an equally a useful message in a biographic narrative about a given subject.

According to Robin (2016:14) the act of biography involves a much wider choice of writer and typically those who write biographies have a background in an appropriate knowledge and skills set such as creative writing, academia and journalism, or all three. They need to bring wide-ranging qualities to the role, plus enthusiasm for the subject, but also a keen critical faculty, the skills of the historian in researching the subject, the ability to evaluate and analyse behaviour against the historical and personal backcloth and essentially, writing skills of a high order.

The several forms of biography according to Lomask (1986:2), accounts for the difficulty to pinch it into a neat definition. He affirms that biography is of many kinds, the form lends itself to so many different purposes. He therefore outlines them to include narrative biography in which the biographer carries an individual from cradle to the grave, though not necessarily in that order. There is also the topical biography in which you try to suggest the whole of the subject by splitting it into its parts. Accordingly, Lomask (1986:3) notes that there is the essay type often spoken of as the portrait: “informal, discursive, with the author occasionally stepping outside the frame of the story to comment on it in the simple first person “I” lingering over the peaks of his hero’s life as he writes and brushing over the valleys”. The variety in the forms of writing biography therefore suggests that the task of the biographer is enormous and not just to chronicle the events in the life of the subject. Enormous because he has to decide on which form to adopt to suit his purpose. And this follows a rigorous research that must be carried out to obtain valid information to authenticate the objectivity of his writing as Lee (2009:13) insists while writing a biography “there must be some involvement, but there must also be detachment”.

The question of objectivity itself in biography is strongly been debated. This is as Lee (2009:12) argues that while writing, the biographer writes ‘from a certain position, constructed by our history, nationality, race, gender, class, education and beliefs’. Therefore to her, there is likely to

be some shared experience between the writer and the subject – so there will be no such thing as an entirely objective treatment.

Writing a life is a process, during which the author must cope with a variety of problems ranging from access to information to objectivity of his work. The pattern for writing is almost that, ‘you find a subject. Do your research then you write and rewrite’ (Lomask. 1986:4). The objective of life writing is also normally that of teaching us to live like someone better than we are hence its educational value. It is assumed that biographers differ in their dedication to veracity as they ask whether small details or large acts are more eloquent ways of communicating character. They have varying views on whether the reader should be led to identify with recognisable behavior (Lee, 2009:17). Consequently, the study dwells on an inquiry into the primary texts to unravel the perspectives from which the subjects are presented.

## **2.4 The History and Development of Biography**

Biography is an age long form of writing that dates back to the time immemorial. According to Smith (2010: 49), “the art of biography can be traced back to a time even before writing existed, in societies where ancient orally recited sagas answered a variety of social needs, from kinship connection to group entertainment”. Smith notes that biography has evolved and developed greatly over the thousands of years since its beginning, but its basic purpose still remains the same; which is to provide “insight into human character, experience of life, and human emotion, as guides to our own complex self-understanding”. While citing Hamilton (2007), Smith writes that the practice of biographic writing began in classical Greek and Roman societies, where records were kept by a “compiler” who “put together collections of essays about statesmen, soldiers, or philosophers. These records, allowed their writers and the people who would read them later to gain information about influential people in their society and the opportunity to

imitate the virtues of the men whose actions were described in the collections of essays” (Smith, 2010:51). In this way, ancient biography is noted to have held dual functions in that it was commemorative and instructive, in which the biographer posed as both a historian and a painter of ‘a soul in its adventures through life’. In corroboration with Smith (2010), Borghart and Temmerman (2010:2) aver that biography as we have it today has its roots in ancient Greek antiquity; “an era with a rich tradition of the descriptions of lives called *vitae* or *bioi*”.

Similarly, Possing (2009:2) traced the evolution of biography to Western antiquity. According to Possing, since antiquity, Western historical biography was regarded as a branch of historiography and has since developed from being a genre consisting of various methodologies, forms and styles within 21<sup>st</sup> century specialised scholarship. Possing maintained that as a genre, biography in the West is considered to have been established by the Greek Plutarch (45-120 AD), who published the comparative lives of Greek and Roman statesmen *Bioi Paralleloii*. This work, together with Tacitus' *De vita Agricolae* (AD 98), Diogenes Laërtius' biographies of Greek philosophers (3rd century AD), and Svetonius' *De Vita Caesarum* (AD 121) characterised what has been called the Classical Hellenistic biography, built upon the fundamental principles of ethics. The central figures were either commended for having fulfilled their duty or censured for falling into the trap of ambition or arrogance.

Also, the Christian gospels of the New Testament are seen as ideal biographies of antiquity. However, Stanton (1974:24) after a vigorous study of the gospels argues that there was a “wholly justifiable insistence that the gospels are not biographies”. In contrast, Burrige (2013:13) argued that the gospels are mainly biographical stating that Stanton’s entire thesis argued that the gospels were about the Jesus tradition —but then he said it was “wholly justifiable” to say that they were not biographies even though his work had just removed most of the reasons for that argument.

In the same vein, Smith (2010:51) insists that the first golden age of biography ended with the collapse of the Roman Empire, and it remained in the shadows until the Hebrew Scriptures were written. The Old Testament of the Hebrews according to Smith is:

based not only on songs, oral legend, traditions, and court records, but . . . [also] on the scripted histories . . . of the tribes of Israel... Yet, it was the account of the life of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels of the New Testament, an account that marked a wholly new symbolic power in Western life depiction with its homely detail... use of anecdotal dialogue... [and] depiction of a personality in crisis that truly stood out as the biographical masterpiece of the Bible.

Smith maintains that when Christians, following the example of Saint Augustine, began to write their own life stories and spread them around the world in an attempt to convert more people to Christianity, “the genre of biography(or, in this case, autobiography) was cemented in Europe” (Smith, 2010: 52).

The classical biography-type was maintained throughout the Middle Ages. A sidelong consideration must here be given to China's great historian Sima Qian, who very early in history developed a biographical form which belongs to a much later Western epoch: *Shiji* (145-85 BC). According to Possing (2009:3), this “work contains biographies, not just of eminent statesmen and soldiers, but also of individuals such as fortune-tellers, courtiers and murderers”. To Possing, a modern approach, in present Western terms, was demonstrated by Sima Qian's contemporary, the poet and literary historian, Liu Xiang, whose work *Lienü Zhuan* (78-79 BC) shows that female personalities in China were already at this stage, considered worthy of biographical studies.

The Greek-Roman golden age of biography vanished with its empires, and in accordance with the requirements of the church and spiritual need, the Middle Ages saw the development of the martyr biography such as John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, (1563) and the manifold lives of holy men and women, known as hagiographies. The purpose was didactic and the central character was

presented as a model of Christian propriety and public virtue: God's creation was portrayed as an individual who, in the course of a lifetime, developed as a moral example to others, or whose destiny was first fulfilled in death. The borderline between biography and hagiography was broad during the Middle Ages. Christian funeral sermons with the focus on the devotional everyday life belief in God included biographical life stories of men and women not belonging to the educated people of culture. Christianity and the Christian biography opened the door to the reception of the hagiographical tradition (Possing 2009, Smith 2010, Burrige, 2013).

According to Possing (2009:3), at the same time though, a non-hagiographic model was also used for biographies of princes and emperors, with Einhard's *Vita Caroli Magni* (829) frequently cited as being the most important. The secular approach to historical biography was introduced during the Italian Renaissance, a change which continued further afield from the 17th up to the 19th century. According Smith (2010:52), during the Renaissance, biography returned to its roots: “biographical depictions showed a return to the classical struggle between, on the one hand, the commemoration of the dead” to spur “more moral behavior...and, on the other, the need to be able to identify with...another mortal individual’s life journey”.

According to this view, ancient biographies and autobiographies were translated and re-published, and new historical accounts of secular lives were produced. Writers like Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh “wonderfully enriched” the art of biography in the sixteenth and seventeenth century through their respected works. Smith notes that during this time, “life depictions grew in quantity, quality, and variety, from journalistic pamphlets to multivolume tomes”(Smith, 2010:52). He maintained that Thomas Fuller coined the word “biographist” in his *History of the Worthies of England* in 1662, “Bishop Gauden . . . coined the alternative, more English-sounding term ‘biographer’ in the same year,” and “the term ‘a biography,’ the word used to describe a specific work of written life depiction had already become fashionable. John

Dryden's definition of biography as the "history of particular men's lives" in 1683 became a "neat definition" that obtained "almost indelible influence on the way the public saw the previous three thousand years of life depiction".

It took "almost three hundred years to extend the word 'biography' to encompass the many possible forms of life depiction— and to cover women," but the work of notable biographers, such as Samuel Johnson, did help to move biography into a more journalistic frame of context. In this context, as Johnson himself put it, both the "vice and virtue" of a biography's subject was examined, and the study of "history [was discouraged] in favour of biography," the latter being a form that was more focused towards a reader's "identification" with the life of the subject, rather than the reader just having access to a series of facts about a figure of interest. Along with the growing popularity of biography came an interest in autobiography (Smith 2010, Burrige 2013). Smith (2010:53) states that the importance of autobiography as a form of nonfiction became even more pronounced after the American and French Revolutions in 1776 and 1789, respectively, because "not only were revolutionaries of interest to the world, but they could even paint their own life stories without waiting for posthumous biographers to do so" (Smith, 2010: 53). As the genre developed in the Victorian period, "it became increasingly focused on the 'rights of the individual' and demonstrated "a growing interest in the self".

The personal experiences of the Puritans who had traveled to America from Europe to escape religious persecution were very different from that of the European clergy, and they were able to "speak freely and write frankly and with relatively little inhibition". Autobiographers, especially the Romantic poets, began to recognise the fact that their work would most likely eventually be read by the public, as shown by Byron's statement that he might "be letting out some secret or other to paralyze posterity".

Unfortunately, Possing (2009: 5) states that this “new propellant” of biography soon came up against obstacles. This led Hamilton in Smith (2010:53) to theorise that a combination of factors, including imperialism, “contributed to the demand for patriotic and exemplary lives, rather than honest, lives,” and changed the way biography and autobiography were written.

Another cause he lists was the economy, an economy in which there became a “profession of ‘biographer’”. The paid biographer was “sucked into a vortex where veneration was extolled, but criticism of a man’s private life and...good name threatened to tarnish the Victorian edifice of work, empire, and medals”. Instead of the nonfiction writers of the time, it came to pass that the Victorian novelists were the ones who followed Johnson’s example and continued to showcase both the good and bad elements of human character in their works. This is why Reed (1966:70) writes that “masterpieces of biography seemed to be more significantly atypical than typical of the period in which produces them, and a coherent line of literary development can more frequently be traced through bad works than through good”.

Possing (2009:5) however, asserts that the decisive biographical innovation came from Italy with Francesco Petrarca’s (1304-74) *De Viris Illustribus* and developed from Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-75) sense for the specific, the classical times and the secular in *De Claris Mulieribus* and *Vita di Dan-te Alighieri*. Petrarca’s and Boccaccio’s glorification of brilliant individualities connected to the much later liberal individualism in society. Early women encyclopedias from Germany confirm this tendency. Biographical literature became that extensive during the 18th and the 19th century that EM Ottinger's 1854 bibliography of biographical literature was only rudimentary, even though it was wide-ranging.

From the end of the 18th century, J Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) is still singled out as the pioneering biography of the era, as it was based on empirical material in the form of

letters, private papers, conversations, interviews and personal observation of Samuel Johnson's comportment. This was the first biography to construct a nuanced, candid personality focusing on the character of the protagonist. In the historical biography of the time, the history of human achievement was fundamentally the story of imposing male heroes. In the biographical discourse of the 19th century, also Thomas Carlyle's lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) have a paradigmatic position claiming "the History of the World" to be the biographies of great men (Possing, 2009:4). Thus claiming biography as a branch of history, employing similar processes of research and scholarship in the making of biography, Carlyle claimed historical biography as essentially the chronicle of an individual's life journey whereas Boswell and Johnson had claimed it an art of human portraiture. This difference of perception illustrates the eternal question on history versus biography that has hung over historical biography from antiquity for a long time that followed.

But still, at the end of the 19th century, it was the exceptional (male) person and the developmental process which characterised the 'life-and-letters' biography. Even though ideas and people from the community at large were incorporated into the biographies via reference to letters, and via learned, illustrious and strange women, there was generally no trace of historical reflection on the individual and society nor any change of the skewed gender balance in the genre of historical biography. Possing (2009:4) states that, the Russian GV Plekhanov was a pioneer introducing the issue of the dynamics between the individual personality and the society as a historical transformation factor with *The Role of the Personality in History* (1898). The impact of his work in Western historical biography seems to be limited.

According to Possing (2009: 5), the modern life story, as 20th-century historical biography has been called, came about as the result of the crisis for humanism, Christianity and rationalism

which followed in the wake of Darwinism and psychoanalysis as developed during the 19th century. The modern life story in literary history was introduced with L Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918), which came to play the same revolutionary role for historical biographers of all professions as Boswell had played for biography in the 18th and 19th centuries: the introduction of the artistic, interpretative biography, given form via selection, concentration and interpretation of the sources. The idea was to get behind the myth of the subject of the biography and pave the way for the writing of biographies of men *and* women. Another member of the famous Bloomsbury group, Virginia Woolf, went even further in her book *The Art of Biography* (1939). Rather than attempting to escape the limitations of the genre as Strachey had, Woolf urged biographers to endorse them by taking the front position “testing the atmosphere, detecting falsity, unreality, and the presence of obsolete conventions”. The biographer’s sense of truth had to be alive, because biography was “only at the beginning of its career; it has a long and active life before it, we may be sure – a life full of difficulty, danger, and hard work” (1939). Thus, both Strachey and Woolf positioned themselves as pioneers in the 20th century paradigm of *literary* historical biography.

In the same vein, Hamilton in Smith (2010:54) corroborates the above assertion and explains that in the early twentieth century, people “working in fields other than written biography began to covet the very thing that was the mainstay and rationale of biography: real lives...[and] real-life experiences”. Hamilton notes that Sigmund Freud, a neurologist, went against Victorian “uptightness and obfuscation” when he discussed the intimate details of his patients’ lives frankly in his writing, and found “shocking success”. According to Smith, Freud argued that biographers should not look at a subject’s life as an “idealised Victorian exemplar, but as a psychological riddle”. He posits that the works of Freud, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and other writers at the beginning of the twentieth century did “damage to Victorian hypocrisy” by

pointing out the “self-satisfied, preening tomes of Victorian hero-worship” produced by the “biographers” of their time.

By 1929, a “new biography” had come to America. Instead of ““trying to write man’s eulogy or commemorate his achievements or hold him up as a profitable example, [they sought] to understand what manner of man he was, to analyse his character and motives, and to classify him and put him in his place with other...human beings” (Smith, 2010:54).

Hamilton in Smith (2010:54) brings up an important point when he writes that the introduction of film into American society brought about an entirely new medium in which biography could be expressed. “Given society’s moral rules regarding the depiction of real as opposed to fictionalised life,” documentary was “unable to compete” with the more radical, sensual, and exciting fictional films that “came to offer a closer, more vivid portrait of human lives”. But this exciting new artistic outlet also had its drawbacks; as Hamilton notes, “with the advent of the soundtrack in 1928, movies overnight became the hypnotic opium of the people—a medium that could be exploited...for money... [and] political purposes” (cited in Smith 2010: 54).

World War II once again is also noted to have changed the parameters of Western biography. Millions of individuals’ wills were argued to have triumphed when the allied forces emerged victorious at the end of the war, and some of the servicemen who fought in the war and had since retired turned to writing about their experiences for monetary gains. This biography produced “by people, on behalf of the people, and about individual people...was in this sense a wholly modern phenomenon” (Smith, 2010:55). Though biography existed as a state-censored propaganda with a heavy stamp in the remaining dictatorships of the world, in democracies, the pursuit of biography began to flourish as never before. The people in Western democracies realised the importance of truthfulness and individuality and began to value them greatly in their works. And these “people, including blacks, Jews, feminists, homosexuals, and hippies, were

themselves very diverse, referred to as the antiheroes of the day [who] demanded not only to change the approach and media of biography, but also to be heard by it” (Smith 2010:55).

Hamilton writes that by the end of the late twentieth century, the role of biography had become “a plurality of motives and agendum that still characterise biography as it is practiced in different forms and in different media today” (Cited in Smith, 2010:55).

Biography in our present society is called on to provide commemoration and deeper insight into personality, identity, the self, factual record, the raising of individuals and groups from obscurity, entertainment and artistic license. Harold Nicolson feared that “print biography as a ‘branch of literature’ might...cease to exist, for people interested in ‘all the facts’ would demand biographical work as information—thus spelling the ruin of biography as an art”. However, Smith (2010:55) argues that the “boom in biographical output in every medium” prevented such a thing from happening because the exploration of lives “through fictional, filmic, and other narrative techniques” became so popular.

After the 1960s biography evolved in that it was “no longer limited to conventional lifespan. Authors, playwrights, and filmmakers now claimed the right to address fragments of lives, too. Every period of a subject’s life—“birth, childhood, early years, life, career, relationships, death, and the afterlife” became fair game for biographers. Modern biography in England and America for instance, grew increasingly fascinated with celebrity and began “to depict, and even deconstruct, living individuals”. Perhaps because of biography’s close ties to fiction writing, it, in its modern form, began to borrow narrative techniques, confirming Nicolson’s prediction that “fiction—or at least the techniques and imaginative play of fiction—might be incorporated with biography”.

## 2.5 Biography and Life Writing

Recent developments in literary criticism show a growing tendency to focus attention on life writing in general and biography in particular. Life writing, as Leader (2015) explains, is now used as a generic term by critics to refer to the bundle of texts, which are often grouped together, because they tell the story of the 'self' of their subjects:

Life writing is a generic term used to describe a range of writings, about lives or parts of lives, or which provide materials out of which lives or parts of lives are composed these writings include not only memoir. Autobiography, biography, diaries, autobiographical fiction, and biographical fiction, but also letters, writs, written anecdotes, depositions, court proceedings...marginalia, nonce writings, lyric poems, scientific and historical writings and digital forms (including blogs, tweets, Facebook entries) (315).

Recent areas of interest in the studies of life writing include the relation of biography to scientific discovery. Life writing is also an integral part of studies relating to the Holocaust, genocide, testimony, confession, gender and apartheid. Life writing has become increasingly popular and as a result, academic research into the subject has also increased. Life writers and historians have often argued that life writing and life history are useful academically, as they provide first hand stories and accounts of individuals and their relationship with the society, history and public life; as well as expose detailed personal insights just as Tamboukou (2010: 364) argues that life writing encompasses everything from the fictional to the factual. This art form professes to reproduce a given life once lived. Life writing is a form of narrative arrangement of reality told sometimes by the self or by another. It is the recreation of a life by another person through writing by another person that is called biography. Biography is however, described as a detailed description of a person's life. It involves more than just the basic facts like education, work, relationship and death; it portrays a person's experience of these life events (Casper, 1999: 80). Unlike a profile and or curriculum vitae, a biography presents a subject's life history,

highlighting various aspects of his or her life, including intimate details of those experiences and may include an analysis of the subject's personality.

The independent genre of biography, as distinct from general history writing, began to emerge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and reached its contemporary format at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hughes, 2009: 159). Hughes argues that both biography and history are often concerned with the past, but it is in the education and selection of sources that they differ. In other words, the construction of life can be regarded as a craft rather than an art; techniques of research and general rules for testing evidence can be learned by any one and thus need involve comparatively little of that personal commitment associated with art (Hughes, 2009: 159). Biography more typically focuses upon a single human being and deals in the particulars of that person's life. However, Volker Bergham (2004:151) commenting on Ian Kershaw's lecture on "Biography and the Historian: Opportunities and Constraints" argues that "the biographical perspective should be used as a window to examine more complex problems in a very specific and unique way rather than in the classical sense of writing about lives of prominent individuals".

In this form of life writing, it is important to share our thoughts, perceptions and feelings of our subjects so as to reveal what was most important and inspiring about their lives; their unique experiences and the life lessons that came from them. This has probably been the primary objectives of biographies and biographers (quoted from <https://celebrationsoflife.net/life-reflections/how-to-write-life-reflection-story>. Par.1).

## **2.6 Review of New Historicism**

New Historicism is a literary theory which was developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of an American critic, Stephen Greenblatt and gained prominence in the contemporary literary world. The scholars concerned with New Historicism gave it a number of names

including, “Critical Historicism, Historical Materialist Criticism and Cultural Poetics” (Zengin, 2007:1). The theory suggests that literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of history in order to evaluate how the work was influenced by the socio-political and historical order underlying the society of its time. Consequently, it draws attention to the close connection between cultural texts and history.

Critics of New Historicism consider the year 1980 as the beginning of New Historicism and also consider Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) as the seminal work that announced the chief characteristics of the theory. Although in this essay, Greenblatt preferred to call the theory Cultural Poetics, he later coined and inaugurated the name New Historicism in his introduction to *The Forms of Power and Power of Forms in the Renaissance*:

Many of the present essays give voice...to what we may call the New Historicism, set apart from both the dominant historical scholarship of the past and the formalist criticism that...the New Historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature (1982: 5).

New Historicism developed as a reaction to formal criticism such as New Criticism and Russian Formalism that propose formal analysis and see literary work as a self-sufficient object that can be properly interpreted in isolation, independent of the biography, social and historical contexts, politics and other extrinsic matters. New Historicism emphasises that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than an isolated creation. It focuses on the contexts of all kinds in which a work of art is produced. Instead of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical contexts, New Historicist reading focuses mainly on “the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meaning, its effects and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluation” (Abrams, 2014:182). The main objective of New Historicism according to Bhat (2014:12):

...is to see literary works in the historical background and to focus in socio-cultural circumstances...It places a text within the totality of socio-cultural institutions and practices that make the history and cultural milieu of a particular moment of time and place.

Moreover, according to Magaji (2016:15) citing Miller (1991), New Historicists are not alone on this idea of placing literature in its context. Miller, though famously regarded as a formalist, states that:

Works of literature do not simply reflect or are not simply caused by their contexts, they have a productive effect in history. This can and should be studied. To put this in another way, the only thing that sometimes worries me about the turn to history now as an explanatory method is the implication that I can fully explain every text by its pre-existing historical context. But the publication of these works was itself a political or historical event that in some way or another changed history. I think that if you don't allow for this, then, literature is not much worth bothering with (cited in Magaji, 2016:15).

Miller's argument from the foregoing shows the importance of placing literary work in its socio-political text and also demonstrates the complex relationship between text and context of which New Historicism differs from Old Historicism because they seek to show that in the same way that context shapes a literary work, the text also influences history. In other words, "the literary text interacts as both product and a producer" of the context it reflects (Abrams, 2014:183).

Nevertheless, New Historicism aim simultaneously to understand the literary text through its historical context and to understand the cultural and intellectual history through literature. Montrose (1986:6) coined the terms "the historicity of text" and the "textuality of history" as the phrases in New Historicism to emphasise how a literary text is bound up in its historical context and how history itself is like a text in the sense that it is not a list of objective facts; an idea that is influenced by post-structuralists' tendency of turning things on their heads. This definition of New Historicism by Montrose captures the relationship between literature and history both in terms of documenting the past as well as the interpretation of it. With this New historicists then have made a return to history in literary criticism, accepting history itself as a text and considering that the historian himself

is trapped within his own historicity. According to Montrose (1986:12), New Historicism provides answers to questions in order to bring issues into play and to stake out or hunt down specific positions within the discursive spaces mapped by those issues.

According to Veseer (1989:xi), New Historicism as a theory aims to understand the work of art through historical context and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature which documents the new discipline of the history of ideas. Veseer further emphasises that New Historicists eschew overarching supposed constructs in favour of surprising coincidences and that they perform amazing fixed expression in order to avoid casual, deterministic balance. Veseer argues that by forsaking what it sees as an outmoded vocabulary of allusion, symbolisation, allegory and mimesis, New Historicists seek less limiting means to expose the manifold ways culture and society affect each other. Veseer however, submits that the central difficulty with these terms lies in the way they distinguish literary texts, history and politics as foreground and background (Veseer, 1989:xii).

One of the significant peculiarities of the theory is its refusal to separate literary texts from non-literary texts. The critics in this school recognise all texts as cultural artifacts. New Historicism is therefore, understood to be interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents, in history as text. According to Zengin (2007:14), New Historicism “accepts that the past exists only in texts and thus the past can only be known by their written texts”.

New Historicism is often being accused of subjectivity as reducing all literary works to history and an author's ideology in textual interpretation. This argument might be as well considered from a different perspective that New Historicism could be more embracing affecting all changes in human life and development

**CHAPTER THREE:  
GIVING LIFE TO THE PAST:  
*THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AHMADU COOMASSIE***

**3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is an analytical discussion about the re-creation of life in a biographical narrative and presentation of the biographer's subject in a bid to celebrate a life once lived. The major problem confronting any biography is historical accuracy and truth. The primary aim of any biographer is perhaps the hagiographic celebration of an individual whose life he considers capable of imparting positively on the life of the readers. This chapter therefore, explores Coomassie and Sani's *Integrity and Service: The Life and Times of Ahmadu Coomassie* with a view to unraveling their ideological perspective in the presentation of their subject. While it is incontestable to say that biography is an attempt to idolise a historical personage of an individual, the historical account being presented is usually considered to be one that does not coerce the reader into such a conviction that the subject once lived beyond reproach; a saintly life that presents him as a superman, over and above other humans.

The chapter is divided into two basic subheadings under which the discussion concerning the presentation of the subject is going to be based. At the end of the analysis in this chapter, the study will ascertain whether the subject presented to us is devoid of superficial perceptual representation of the biographers.

### **3.2 A Brief Summary of Integrity and Service**

*Integrity and Service: The Life and Times of Ahmadu Coomassie* has eloquently captured the life and personality of this remarkable Nigerian. A legendary man most respected and a revered elder that in the 81 years of his life profoundly touched many lives. Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie was a school teacher, an educationist, a pioneer technocrat, a captain of industry and an elder statesman, who spent his entire lifetime in the service of his country, Nigeria and humanity. He was born to an influential family of Muslim clerics and brought up by a leading traditional ruler in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though Mallam Ahmadu had only a few years of formal education, with hard work and private studies, he made it right to the top as a pioneer educationist in northern Nigeria and successfully championed the establishment of the first and the most successful mass literacy programme in the northern region in the mid-1950s (Coomassie and Sani, 2008: Blurb).

### **3.3 *Integrity and Service* as an Attempt to Bring the Past to Life**

Biography generally can be regarded as a bridge between two worlds; a hybrid of the past and the present to influence the future of the living. *Integrity and Service* equally serves as a link to these opposing worlds of the living and the dead to explore the life of an individual who once devoted his life and times to the services of humanity generally and his community in particular. The authors capture the life of the subject almost chronologically from the cradle to the grave. The narrative adopts a direct historical approach devoid of fictional embellishments. However, through vivid historical account, the reader is taken through the entire life of the subject who, in the words of Gowon (2008: ix) was “a legendary man, a most respected and revered elder who in the 81 years of his life, profoundly touched many lives”. Throughout the book, the mood and attitude that the reader is coerced into is that of admiration. The work adopts principally a hagiographic tone inundated with encomiums in the bid to reconstruct the legendary personage

of the subject. However, Possing (2009:6) contends that with the renaissance of biography, the narrative form has become a sanctuary for dramatic reflection on the human ideal in the perspective of the flawed living individual which presents biography to become a mere eulogy. Keen (2016: 9) avers that biographers, while presenting their subjects, evoke the feeling of empathy in the readers.

Coomassie and Sani in the same vein, introduced to the reader right from his cradle a man perfectly made and destined for lofty heights in his career. This in effect, carries a hagiographic structure which has deified the subject to an esteemed statusquo as an exemplary life to the reader. According to Lee (2009:25), hagiographies were life writings about lives lived in imitation of Christ, in retreat from the world, dedicated to God, providing lessons in exceptional godliness and purity. She maintains that they start with early signs of spirituality shown through childhood incidents followed by a break, often violent and difficult, with worldly connections through family, society, politics, government, perhaps a conversion and commitment to a holy life. This is equally captured in the life of Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie by the biographers. In order to portray all these attributes about the subject, the biographers present a noble ancestry about the family of their subject through also his “legendary” father, Mallam Sallau. Sallau’s spiritual life is portrayed magnificently as a mark of influence later in the life of the primary subject. Sallau’s religious life is summed up as captured below:

The Emir held Mallam Sallau in high esteem. Whenever he was on his way to the mosque, he would stay at a place very close to Mallam Sallau’s house and wait for him so they could go to the mosque together. On many occasions, especially in the absence of the incumbent imam, Mallam Sallau was asked to lead the people in prayer, including the Friday prayer. Similarly, whenever Mallam Sallau went to the palace to exchange greetings with the emir, a large number of people followed him, just as they did when he [Sallau] was on the throne. Mallam Sallau’s house was always teeming with people either coming to pay homage or to take lessons in Arabic and Islamic studies. The house thus became a centre for learning (Coomassie and Sani, 2008:72).

The foregoing excerpt does not only present a sublime personality of Mallam Sallau but also his religious exploits and his relationship with the people. He is presented as a man of the people whose exemplary life influences many of his students even as a foreigner in Kumasi. The reader is informed that Mallam Sallau is a descendant of Katsina who migrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Ghana where he was later made a chief. To buttress his egalitarian leadership qualities, while as chief in Kumasi, he had to resign his kingship and return to Nigeria after a revolt against him that he is a foreigner by certain sections of his domain who felt it was their right and turn to rule. The reader is soon told that the Kumasi people realised their mistake and rallied Mallam Sallau back to continue with his reign:

It must have dawned on the people of Kumasi Ghana that a serious mistake had been made in revolting against the person who sincerely meant well for them. Many who lived under Mallam Sallu's just governance were tried to persuade him to return to Ghana so that his dynamic and responsible leadership would move Ghana forward...the good people of Ghana kept on sending emissaries to Katsina trying to convince Mallam Sallau to return to Ghana to continue his good work (75).

The above has shown that Mallam Sallau himself was a just and dynamic leader of consummate reputation and integrity to influence his society to greater height. Even during the time he briefly returned to Nigeria, his popularity grew significantly through his generosity. The authors have devoted several chapters to introduce the noble family background of the subject emphasising the sterling qualities of Ahmadu Coomassie's father. This is done perhaps to entrench in the reader the idea that Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie descends from a gracious royal family which has influenced him in his later life.

Coomassie and Sani reveal that Ahmadu Coomassie did not grow completely under the care of his father. After the death of his elder brother Muhammadu, who was sent from Kumasi to Katsina to stay with the emir of Katsina, Muhammadu Dikko, Ahmadu who was the last born drafted to Katsina to replace him. He was approximately sixteen at that time. The emir

immediately enrolled him into the Provincial Elementary School in Katsina. Just as Lee (2009:25) would state that the biographic subject usually shows signs of greatness from childhood, Ahmadu Coomassie's account is no different: "The young Ahmadu had only completed elementary one in Kumasi before coming to Katsina yet his spoken English and the standard of his literacy by far superseded that of Elementary Standard Three in Katsina" (58). Although several factors are alluded to as the reason for this but the biographers summed up that "Ahmadu was highly intelligent". In this representation, the subject is introduced to the reader as someone who is by nature destined for greatness following his exceptional brilliance and intelligence. The biographers describe him as a genius who excelled in all his academic programmes in the elementary school as shown in these words:

Within a few weeks of Ahmadu Coomassie's enrolment in the school, his genius started to reveal itself. He did not find any difficulty in adjusting to the higher class in which he found himself. He was top of the class at the end of the season, despite the fact that the other pupils were three years ahead of him. His performance was so impressive that the school authority thought that putting him in the class... would be waste of time and talent, so he was promoted straight to class six (59).

We are here presented with a promising lad whose academic prowess surpassed all that competed against him. Coomassie and Sani emphasise that:

The accelerated promotions Mallam Ahmadu enjoyed were deserved as they were based on his academic excellence, hard work and good character which formed the basic requirements of promotion to a higher class. The grooming he received at this stage of his life was to become very useful to him and in actual sense prepared him to face with some degree of confidence all future challenges (61).

In this early account of Ahmadu Coomassie's life, the biographers reveal that despite having excelled in his basic school, he could not get placement in the Katsina College for reasons still shrouded in obscurity. He then chose to remain at the Middle School when he was made a pupil teacher. To further eulogise his brilliance, the biographers intimate the reader that while he was teaching as an inexperienced teacher in the Middle School, Ahmadu Coomassie was instructed in teaching methods by one Mr. Batten, a Briton where he learnt "quickly and within a short time

he became a highly efficient teacher and this earned him the admiration of the education officers, his colleagues, the pupils and their parents” (88). The reader is informed that Ahmadu Coomassie taught there for six months from July to December 1928, this time as a fully employed teacher of the Native Authority with a salary of thirty pounds per annum. It is therefore, later to be revealed that Ahmadu Coomassie would share his salary with the emir, Muhammadu Dikko and his cousin, Muntaka as a mark of his humane disposition. The attitude surrounding their presentation of their subject is replete with praise which is similar in outlook with biblical accounts during the Christian era which applied “biography to its educational mission of dramatising the life, and spreading the teaching, of Jesus” (Parke, 2002:7).

According to Parke (2002:7) when the apocalypse which was originally predicted to arrive before the second century, did not come, the early church began making institutional plans for a prolonged earthly mission which included commemorating the lives of saints and martyrs, first in the form of Saint’s Day calendars, then gradually developing into narrative accounts capturing the entire life of the subject. From this stage, biography started being seen as a reconstruction of an individual life in historical context, combining thorough scholarship with skeptical assessment of evidence and sympathetic engagement.

As such, modern biography’s chief aim is understood to be neither praise nor blame, nor is didacticism understood to be its driving motive. Lee (2009:16) argues that biography should have some value for the reader. She maintains that biographies raise moral issues. According to Lee, classical and Christian versions presented their subjects as archetypal of moral standards. A good life lived, or martyrdom, provided a model for good behavior or spiritual aspiration while a bad ruler or a fall from greatness provided an awful warning.

In *Integrity and Service*'s subject, this exemplary strain that characterises biography has never disappeared. While Ahmadu Coomassie served as a teacher, he is presented as a model for other teachers. His teaching methods and sterling qualities as a teacher are captured thus:

He was highly efficient punctual and tolerant of the students. He used interactive methods to arouse the students' interest and to facilitate understanding. He made sure his students understood his lessons well. His teaching methods made his classes quite interesting and conducive to learning. He ensured a high standard of hygiene for his students were serious which made them exceptionally good (93).

This is a demonstration of Mallam Ahmadu's endearing qualities as a teacher. The excerpt captures the qualities of a good teacher towards effective teaching and learning. And to cap the efficacy of his methodology, we are informed that most of his students were serious and excel in their studies. The reader who learns about the methods adopted by Mallam Ahmadu to achieve a successful teaching and learning would imitate his approach to achieve good results as a teacher. Accordingly, biography here can be seen to be the role of history while teaching us to live our lives and open our minds to lives very unlike our own.

Mallam Ahmadu's astuteness and sterling qualities went a long way to earning him the status of a model in any assignment he was given. While he continued his services as teacher, one of his contemporaries, Abubakar Imam was selected to write a Hausa book that will be used as a third grade reader for elementary schools in the Northern Region:

He swung into action and by the end of October 1938 he had completed a master piece titled *Karamin Sani Kukumi*...which was modeled on Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie and his class. Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie, the teacher featured as "Mallam Bambadiya" while the students were mostly Mallam Ahmadu's students in the elementary school as well as students and working colleagues at the Middle School (97).

The act of re-creating Mallam Ahmadu in a book is an attempt at encouraging morality to promote didactic ideals in the society. This is an eloquent way of promoting good moral character which is one of the major attributes in life writing generally. The author, Abubakar

Imam while idolising Coomassie adopts his boyhood school name which he earned based on his keen interest in sports especially soccer. The reader is informed that he was equally a fine footballer who could pull out crowd en mass to watch him:

He was an excellent footballer. In fact, it was rumoured that some goalkeepers preferred letting the ball into the net rather than risk being hit by Mallam's powerful shots. Whenever he was playing in a game, people turned up en mass to watch him in action and as he took a powerful shot they gave a thunderous shout of BAMBADIYA! (98).

From the foregoing, the reader is presented with one of the finest footballers of his time. He is presented as a compelling character with endearing qualities that elevated him to the lofty heights he had attained. Lee (2009:25) states that hagiographies just as the character of Ahmadu Coomassie being presented in this narrative, portrayed the subject's sayings, conversations, visions and miracles, culminating in a farewell address, a holy death of martyrdom, miraculous posthumous proofs of sainthood and evidence of lasting influence. The historical account of Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie presented to us does not distance itself from such attributes completely. From the beginning of the book to its conclusion, the authors are determined to convince the readers to accept their subject as a historical legendary figure whose life is worth celebrating. The work can therefore be seen as a "miraculous posthumous proofs of sainthood" of the subject.

Nevertheless, it can be read through the narrative that during Mallam Ahmadu's stay as a teacher at the Katsina Middle School from 1938 to 1941, he contributed immensely to the development of the school. "As an intelligent teacher with lofty ideas, he introduced many activities which helped to raise the academic standard of the school" (101). This is why when the Native Authority decided to boost elementary education in the Northern Province, there was an urgent need for a hard working, dedicated and experienced teacher to be appointed to ensure effective supervision. Consequently, "after a long and intensive search, Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie was

selected as the most suitable and was persuaded to learn his classes at the Katsina Middle School” (101).

It is based on his influence in which Lee (2009:25) would say characterised biographies during the Christian era that got him appointed by the Native Authority as a visiting teacher. The choice of Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie as stated above was carefully arrived at through an investigative enquiry of his personality and identity. The Native Authority engaged in some thoughts in relation to the nature and nurture in the character formation of Coomassie’s selfhood and to the negotiation between his intrinsic existence and public performance.

However, Lee (2009:15) argues that it is not necessary for the biographer to have a theory or a set of general rules about identity because it can be a disadvantage. She therefore, opines that biographers who succumb to the occupational temptation of using their subject as a peg for generalisations about human behavior can sound ponderous. To her, biographies that apply a specific theory of human behavior derived from Freud or Bentham or Marx to the telling of a life story can retrospectively seem limited or simplifying. But in a writing of a life story, some idea of how human beings function and what identity consists of is bound to emerge though more often than not in an unsystematic way.

The biographers here have also carried out a research in the process of re-creating the life of their subject as he was characteristically committed to his work and service to humanity. While working as a visiting teacher with Native Authority for instance, he, in conjunction with a white colonial counterpart, Mr. C.K.Brook, started mass education for adults in Katsina. This initial attempt was welcome by the emir, Sir Usman Nagogo who showed keen interest and assured the duo of his full support. Mallam Ahmadu’s spirited commitment to the development of education in his society also received support from the provincial colonial authority who sent him to

Kaduna to study their methods in their adult education classes. The methods were to be integrated into the existing model in Katsina province. Upon his return to Katsina province, more adult literacy classes were opened and lessons continued in earnest. Such is the influence and contribution of Mallam Ahmadu Coomasie to the educational development in Katsina. We also learn that in order to enlighten the general public and providing reading material for the adult literacy classes, he established a local Hausa newspaper *Himma* which received support from a host of British officers.

Throughout his public life, Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie is portrayed as displaying sterling qualities of excellence, integrity and doggedness. He is usually recommended for one assignment or another as a result of his meritorious service. For instance, the biographers report that when the regional administrative headquarters of the adult education campaign was established in Zaria, arrangements for effective monitoring and coordination of the programme in all provinces were top priority for the chief adult education officer. This however, called for effective monitoring and coordination of the programme in all provinces were top priority for the chief adult education officer. This however called for a capable hand that can manage the task. Coomassie and Sani reports:

Ahmadu Coomassie readily came to mind, especially considering his contributions to the development of education in the province, his integrity and the respect he commended among the people...would greatly enhance the acceptability of the programme to the people (119).

The above caption is an explicit display of an unimaginable impact and the legendary role played by Ahmadu Coomassie in his northern province. Here, the reader is presented with a man that is committed and focused to the educational development of his people. Following his track records as portrayed in the work, he was constantly been invited to perform one job or another. Consequently, the reader is informed, he had served the government in several capacities as an

educational officer. His escapades while serving in this capacity as educational officer and facilitator has been captured by the biographers with almost minute details. They summarily pay tribute to his input in the development of education in his region in the following words:

Mallam would not be forgotten as the mastermind behind one of the most comprehensive and successful educational programmes of his time. He remained chief adult education officer up to September 1959, when he converted to administration as Administrative Officer I, the most senior northerner in the service of the region at that time (131).

While he navigated his services to the administrative capacity, his sterling qualities continued to spur him up to greater position. Coomassie and Sani reports that during his time “as a permanent secretary in the education ministry, he has been credited as one of the brains behind the establishment of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, the pioneer university in the region”. This again has added explanations to his legendary and heroic statusquo in the development of the education sector in northern Nigeria. His portraiture is conceived as been sine qua non in the history and discussion of education in northern Nigeria in general and Katsina state in particular. His pioneering role in the establishment of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria later earned him a place in the management council while serving as a member of the council of the university College Ibadan, (now University of Ibadan).

The work has verbosely equipped readers with details about Mallam Ahmadu’s personality, career and worldview. This is done as a conscious attempt to re-create the imagery of his personhood and an endearing lifestyle that entrench him as a role model and legend, who has compellingly reminded the reader to always tread the path of integrity and humane public disposition. He is described as a raconteur with compelling public speech ability. “Mallam Ahmadu was a very compelling communicator. He had a good command of English and Hausa and it was said that he wrote speeches for the Sardauna on special occasions” (145). These words

have not only intimated us of Ahmadu's ingenuity in public speech but it has also offered explanations on his legendary status in the region.

After so many years of his public life, Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie deservedly retired from public service to join the private sector. During his time in the private sector, he equally demonstrated a consummate ability to his duties as a veteran public servant. This had earned him several appointments with numerous companies including the banking sector. His veteran services while serving as the chairman Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB), he helped served the government from what would have been a colossal loss when a white investor Mr. Nagaty fraudulently engaged her into partnership for the establishment of Zaria Textile Mills Limited. This was considered a remarkable feat in the discharged of his duties to the state. According to Coomassie and Sani, this is one of the reasons why government had to persuade him to remain on the job when he indicated intention to leave NIDB in 1971.

Throughout his working career as reported in the narrative, he is presented as one who remained committed to his duties and always excelled in every of his assignment. His brilliant services marked with integrity and trust was one of the notable qualities that characterised Mallam Ahmadu. This explains why he is described as "one of the few prominent citizens who retained his position as chairman of Standard Bank of Nigeria" (204) when the new military government of General Murtala Ramat Muhammad made sweeping reforms to rid the country of corruption and indiscipline. According to the authors, "this reflects the integrity and credibility he had built for himself"(204).

### **3.4 Biography and the Expectation of Truth**

The very ability to write about one's life and even one's self is normally highly contested based on its ability to present the truth. The fact that biographies are writings about historical legendary individuals; the ability of the biographer to present the reader with the original version of life once lived or as it is lived by the subject is persistently being a subject for debate by critics. This owes to the fact that the biographers are always fascinated by the good deeds of their subject thereby undermining the need for the incorporation of those weaknesses of their subject which are peculiar with every mortal being.

This controversy is consistently being unfolded in contemporary studies about life writing which some biographers as well as life writers are often being accused of apotheosis, others of indiscretion and betrayal. However, biographies and in fact, life writing generally, establish a reader expectation of honesty, openness and truth. In the recreation of a life in texts, a biographer coerces the reader into accepting the account of the life he/she is reading in the text. Barthes, cited in Green (2008:51), maintains that language produces the identity and that therefore identity is artificial and only evident through the text.

In *Integrity and Service*, the question of truth and acceptability of the account of the subject is a problematic issue that invites critical cross-examination. The question of truth and acceptability of this account becomes more evident when Lee (2009: 12) asserts that the biographer should be objective and that nothing about the life being presented should be hidden. However, Mallam Ahmadu Coomassie, as presented to the reader, is one that consistently places an emphasis on his moral life and integrity throughout his life time. Consequently, Ahmadu Coomassie's apotheosis has created a vacuum in the objective apprehension of his entire life as an epitome of moral integrity. In *Integrity and Service*, the biographers are particularly committed to a singular

approach; a deification of their subject thereby leaving the reader with an incomplete account of their subject. Lee writes that while writing a biography “there must be some involvement but there must also be detachment” (13). While citing Richard Holmes, Lee described biography as a broken bridge into the past:

You stood at the end of the broken bridge and looked across carefully, objectively, into the unattainable past on the other side...you would never catch them; no, you would never quite catch them. But maybe, if you were lucky, you might write about the pursuit of that fleeting figure in such a way as to bring it alive in the present (13).

The task of bringing the subject back to life in the consciousness of the reader which Coomassie and Sani undertake in this work is rather overemphasised despite his moral influence throughout his career. This has made the life of the subject merely uplifting and overrated but does not actually appear engaging to the study due to its lopsided and hyperbolic apotheosis. This has stripped the work of its objectivity and truth even as Lee (2009:12) insists that the biographers who resist the notion that the story they are telling has anything to do with them, and put themselves in the narrative as little as possible have to admit that their choice of a subject has been made for a reason and that there is no such thing as an entirely objective treatment. “We write from a certain position, constructed by our history, history, nationality, race, gender, class, education beliefs” (Lee, 2009:13). Accordingly, there is likely to be some shared experience between the writer and the subject. Dahiru Coomassie, the co-biographer to the work, is a direct offspring of the subject and at a point in the narrative; we are informed that he had to quit his job with Ahmadu Bello University Zaria to look after the father who forms his subject in the text. It is thus apparent that his affinity with his father whom he had frequently represented at board meetings of some parastatals where his father worked would have shaped his presentation of the life.

As observed from the foregoing, Coomassie and Sani's over-involvement with the subject has become counterproductive. The work is more loess a veneration of the subject as it consciously or unconsciously fails to equip the readers with issues surrounding his private life and the emotional frailties as a mortal being. However, the contemporary reading of biographies generally entails that there should be no censorship and no idealization and that the value of the exercise of life writing depends on its honesty and its thorough investigativeness. Even if it is hard to distinguish at times between a dislike and hypocrisy, the ethics of our society entail openness which Coomassie and Sani skips in their writing in the bid to hagiographically celebrate the life of their subject.

In contemporary studies about biography, lives are not excluded from public scrutiny including the lives of leaders, monarchs, priests, or doctors. The life of each individual is contested to be open to inspection. According to Lee (2009:9), the line we draw between the private and the public has changed. The ambivalent overlap between the public sphere and the private life has been a contentious issue. Since the rise of the mass media, the portrayal of individual life irrespective of rank and status hence developed rapidly and dramatically out of these new affordable technologies and media trends. Reality television, social networking websites, artworks dedication to the banality of the private, point to changing attitudes to what can be exhibited in public. These changes impinge on the writing of biography, always an index of its time. In contemporary time however, such life events that were considered domestic privacies for public consumption are now seen as "unthinkable, unless a biography is being written of recently dead subject with still-living relatives or who close connections whose feelings have to be considered or who may threaten legal action against the biographer if they feel they have been libeled" (Lee, 2009:9).

These changing concepts of privacy and changing attitudes to censorship are the muse and reason for the biographers' concealment of certain aspects of their subject's life. The writing has presented the subject devoid of any incrimination both socially and officially.

In *Integrity and Service*, the biographers are devoted to luring the reader palpably to imagine how the man actually lived his life. This is why Parke (2002:44) writes that "readers of any biography encounter nothing more or less than a representation, however complex that representation maybe". Consequently, it is tempting to state that the man himself but a captured and described, is not the man himself but a captured and hence restricted version. This point can be made more evident as the reader hardly comes across any place in the narrative where the subject is captured beyond the point of veneration, eulogy and deification.

The narrative fails to picture to the reader the varieties of mind of the subject but what the reader ends up achieving is the subject, as he exists in the mind of the biographers. As a result, they strip the narrative of the expected truth which they would hope to engender in the reader. The only incident that is identified to be a frailty in the personality of the subject is his overwhelming predilection for smoking and the biographers have singled this out as his only frailty as they insist: "His only vice was excessive smoking. He consumed over sixty sticks of cigarettes a day and an occasional cigar" (265).

This kind of apotheosis has thus meant that he had never offended someone and no one has ever offended him. This is absolutely a remarkable re-creation of a life that leaves the reader with a picturesque of a supernatural being. However, we are not just presented with an incident that could lead us to the other side of his personality but an incident yet artistically concealed maintaining his apotheosis when he got infuriated after being described as a Ghanaian:

His detractors capitalised on his absence to allege that he had run away, through Maradi, Niger Republic on a motorcycle because he was not a Nigerian. This infuriated him above any other thing and made him more determined to serve on the committee (263).

It is critical to assume that someone so provoked must have reacted in the direction that his personality was at stake. Mallam Ahmadu himself informs us: “I must say we had a difficult and trying time, the UPN newspapers poured scorn on us, all especially myself, calling me a Ghanian” (*Integrity and Service*, 2008:262).

In a strict sense of objective reportage, the authors should have done better to also equip us with his counteraction as is peculiar in most of such instances. However, we are mechanically presented with someone who had usurped such libelous allegation as a muse to execute his assignment even more diligently without any form of retribution. The overgeneralisation of his virtues is rather choking and overwhelmingly superfluous beyond any known mortal especially of our time.

Coomassie and Sani insist that “Mallam had only one vice- he smoked between three and four packets of cigarettes a day. Such was the intensity of his smoking that he had a permanent smoker’s cough” (277). The biographers have literally presented a man Parke (2002:51) would described as being “unbelievably or inimitably heroic”. Their recreation of the subject has again, called the truth of a biographical writing into question. It can be contested here therefore that truth and accuracy of a biography is still an issue yet to be improved upon by biographers since what we actually encounter in such writing is the biographer’s feelings, admiration and perception of the life being described as Lee (2009: 12) admits:

We write from a certain position, constructed by our history, nationality, race, gender, class, education [and] beliefs. This means that there is always a shared experience between the writer and the subject.

*Integrity and Service* actually takes the reader through the entire life of the subject so much that his presence is felt as one reads along till his death in the final chapters. The work is marked by detailed historical accounts which could lead the reader successfully to the fuller understanding of the subject. However, the biographers are overwhelmed with the historical documents as well as the track records including Mallam Ahmadu's robust curriculum vitae while presenting their subject. To this end, they overemphasised his heroics and amazing legendary qualities to the point that he becomes chokingly pious and blameless beyond known humanity. Even in his childhood, the biographers have consciously or unconsciously concealed his youthful exuberances that characterised an adolescent life. Consequently, Ahmadu Coomassie's apotheosis has created a vacuum in the objective apprehension of his entire life as an epitome of moral integrity. In *Integrity and Service*, the biographers are particularly committed to a singular approach- a deification of their subject thereby leaving the reader with an incomplete account of their subject and thus present him largely from their own perspective. The narrative assumes a linear representation of the subject to the reader which contrasts the possibility of an objective apprehension of his character. There is a consistent authorial predilection in the portrayal of the subject whom they consciously re-create to appear appealing to the reader's senses as someone better than we are.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CELEBRATION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH: *THE STORY OF A SHUWA ARAB BOY*

#### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the focus is on Mukhtar's biographical narrative about the life and times of Musa Daggash. The discussion here is based mainly on how the biographer has presented his subject as a way of preserving such a life. This exploration is geared towards ascertaining the perspective from which the life of the subject is been presented to the readers. This is perhaps biography, while still popular, has lost some of its appeal because the representation of the subject is usually marred by overwhelming authorial fondness which has become an unpleasant and meretricious spectacle. This usually leaves the reader pondering the objectivity of the biographer while he attempts to present the life of his subject. In this chapter, Mukhtar's recreation of and presentation of his subject will be interrogated as he strives to achieve the basic goals of honesty, individuation and self-exploration which has always largely define the genre.

#### 4.2 A Brief Summary of Musa Daggash

*Musa Daggash: The Story of a Shuwa Arab Boy* portrays the life and times of Alhaji Musa Daggash, an eminent bureaucrat and excellent administrator, whose immense contributions to national development spanned over fiftyfive years. Musa Daggash's civil service career embodied commitment, courage, modesty, integrity and transparency which were rare even in his own times. The book also investigates different aspect of our historical development ranging from education and administration, to the economy (Mukhtar, 2000: Blurb). The work takes the reader through the different stages in the life of Musa Daggash as he was committed to discharge his duties diligently excelling in almost all assignments given to him. Mukhtar in this work is committed to celebrate the subject a rare genius that ought to be emulated in a society that is in dire need of honesty, transparency, justice, and fairness.

### **4.3 Biography and the Celebration of Life after Death: Mukhtar's *Musa Daggash: The Story of a Shuwa Arab Boy***

Mukhtar's biography of Musa Daggash is a narrative which he apparently ventured into because he became interested and fascinated by the legendary life lived by his subject. In order to equip the reader with the full information about the subject, the biographer takes us to the genealogical background of his subject and brings us closer to his entire family life before steadily capturing his experiences in the later years of his life.

Mukhtar seems to be fully aware of the task ahead of him while presenting the subject. Consequently, the book is full of the interviews he had conducted with his sources as well as accounts of the evidence he discovered along the way. This he does for the purpose of achieving symmetry in his own writing. To achieve this, Mukhtar tries as much as possible to be an objective narrator. He uses accounts from sources both friendly and hostile to the subject and presents both sides of the stories in his biography. This he does for the purpose of maintaining balance throughout his biography in which he presents both positive and negatives aspects of Daggash's personality and character. This is noticeable in the presentation of Daggash's childhood while in the elementary school.

Mukhtar reports that Musa Daggash had a weak physique which made him vulnerable to bully boys in his class. Again, because of his physique, he had a general apathy towards sports. His most fascinating sport was picnic: "Given Musa Daggash's general apathy towards most sporting activities, mainly due to his weak physique, a less exacting past time such as picnic must have been exhilarating" (47). In this report, Daggash's physical attribute is less asserting. He lacks a compelling physical structure demanded of a hero. This portrayal is apparently, Mukhtar's attempt at maintaining balance in the reconstruction of the life of his subject.

However, while we are made aware of his weak corporeal attribute, he is intellectually assertive. Daggash, during his elementary school days, he is described as “the youngest but probably the cleverest in his class” (48). Even though Mukhtar would present us with apparently an objective account of his subject at this level, the readers are coerced into apathy for Daggash. This is evident in the following report: “[Musa] was not only too young but also a weakling. So taking advantage of Musa’s condition, some of the school bullies trampled on him unnecessarily” (49). The point to note here is that Daggash’s weakness that Mukhtar would emphasised to balance his presentation of his subject is rather on the physical aspect that he would later use to sway emotions of the readers in of his subject as can be seen in the following extract:

Being the youngest and smallest among the four, he had to bring the food from the kitchen, fetch drinking water and for washing their hands as well. Having done all this for the group, when it was time to start eating, Makinta would send Musa on a fool’s errand to call a “Modu Ring”. Poor Musa would normally obey Makinta’s command by shouting the name...several times outside the compound to no avail since in reality, nobody bearing such a name exist in the school...The mission assigned to Musa was after all merely a trick of unjustly punishing the boy and denying him the right to eat his own share of the meal (49).

The foregoing excerpt underscores the balance in the objective portrayal of the subject Mukhtar would want the reader to be consented to. This is because the emphasis on his weak physique as can be gleaned from the excerpt above rather develops the reader’s sympathy for the subject thus making it less a weakness strictly speaking, at least, as captured in the narrative. What is felt in that extract is an attempt by the biographer to convince the reader to fully identify with his subject perfectly in the course of the narration. This therefore, enervates the conviction to see “weakling” as a negative attribute about the personality of Musa Daggash to serve as a point to balance his narrativity.

To fully evoke the reader's sympathy to Daggash, Mukhtar states that the subject was once asked to slap a member of his class Ali, after the latter was unable to spell his own name. This was to follow by a reprisal attack by Ali who beat Daggash to a comma after school:

Probably impressed with his young pupil's ability; the teacher ordered Musa to slap Ali...As soon as the school bell rang...Musa's attempt to move out of the class was suddenly interrupted by Ali's long arms, who pulled the former back and beat him severely, so much so that Musa fell down unconscious (51).

This can be seen as Mukhtar's attempt to be objective and buttress how Musa's weak physique had always caused him severe pains at this elementary stage of his education. From the above, there is balance between Daggash's genius in his class and the bitter experiences that accompanies his exploits which are largely precipitated by his physique. But we are left in no doubt that Daggash was a brilliant student who usually excelled in his class despite the size. For instance, we are told that by the end of their studies at the Middle School in Maiduguri, a small proportion of the exceptional products found their way to Katsina Higher College which Daggash was prominently among. Mukhtar states that:

Out of the twenty four boys that left Bornu Middle School in 1934, only five gained admission into Katsina Higher College; three proceeded to Bauchi Elementary Centre...Musa was among the five Bornu Middle School pupils admitted into Katsina Higher College. He was undoubtedly the brightest among his peers in both the Bornu Provincial School and Middle School (59).

It is not to be argued here that the biographer does not balance the account of his subject on objective ground but the point being stressed is that even though the biographer is committed towards reporting the life of the subject as true as he can, his fondness and admiration of the subject is equally overwhelming. This does not really exonerate him from the general accusation against biographers for lack of objectivity.

However, one feature ubiquitous in Mukhtar's narrative is that he has strived as much as possible to distance himself from most of the eulogies been reported in the text. He allows his sources to

do most of the acclamations so as we do not likely see him directly identifying with the subject to receive our critical whiplashes. This does not actually sever him from both criticism and even his subject. He had chosen his sources himself and had the prerogative to extend it beyond those closest to the subject. Strictly speaking, Mukhtar's admiration for his subject is also manifested at all levels and scenarios that accompanies Daggash's life history.

While Daggash was at the Katsina Higher College in 1934, the biographer reports that he and four other boys from Bornu in the school at the time performed excellently: "Within the first year of admission, as reported auspiciously by some teachers, Musa's class appears to have been one of the brightest ever admitted to the College" (65). According to Mukhtar, various subject teachers made the following remarks concerning Daggash's class:

The teacher in charge of English section regarded it as: "the most promising class that I have yet seen at the College. Pronunciation is good and in written and oral work, the boys are fairly fluent and accurate". [Two years later,] the same teacher commented on the class..."A very good class, slightly above standard. It is difficult however, to give it all the attention it requires (65).

Other teachers quoted to have remarked positively on the class are the science section teacher who observed that:

This class of new entrants is showing great promise in its first year of science. If this promise is maintained, the new syllabus should be mastered without difficulty. They have a sounder knowledge of English than their predecessors and this contributes in no small measure to the greater ease with which they are obtaining a grasp of this subject (65).

The teacher of Mathematics is quoted to have said: "a very uneven class in which the boys from Bornu and Ilorin are to a quite inconvenient extent, ahead of the rest both in natural and acquired ability" (66). With these quotations and several others in the text, Mukhtar hopes to keep his own thoughts out of the book and instead draws on factual information and the subjective opinions of other people in his biography. However, his sources are mainly close associates or family

relations of his subject. It therefore to be assumed that some subjective materials are bound to appear in the book even though it seems in the authors struggle to keep their information and revelations as factual as possible. Mukhtar's personal effort to be neutral in his book can be attributed to this belief that biography should be more objective and ethical.

However, Mukhtar was able to talk with his subject on several occasions including his subject's close friends but rarely or no interview is noted to have been granted to his enemies and more neutral sources that would have helped accomplish a more neutral biography. Thus, just as in most other biographies, the portrait and personality of his subject we encounter is one that is steeped towards a hagiographic celebration. For instance, the bulk of the information relayed to the reader is a direct report from the subject. Most of the information concerning the subject's early life is conveyed by the subject himself through what Mukhtar terms, "Daggash's Reminiscences".

The narrative has hitherto expressed seemingly the opinions and the views of the author against the authentic account of the subject one would expect to grasp while reading the text. This argument can be made with assertion hence New Historicism would argue that historical events are normally irrecoverably lost. According to Barry (1995:174), New Historicism's emphasis bears the influence of the long familiar view in literary studies that the actual thoughts or feeling or intentions of a writer can never be recovered or reconstructed, so that the real living individual is now entirely superseded by the literary text which has come to readers. Accordingly, the intentions of the writer in this narrative to re-create the real historical image and personality of his subject is superseded by his proclivity and admiration which has rendered the text more or less a mere personal eulogy of an illustrious man once lived. This conclusion becomes compelling, as New Historicism seems to accept Derrida's deconstructionist view that there is

nothing outside of the text in the special sense that everything about the past is only available to the reader in textualised form which is “thrice processed. First, through ideology or outlook or discursive practices of its own time, then through those of ours and finally through the distorting web of language itself” (Barry, 1995:174). According to this view, whatever is represented in a text is thereby remade. Mukhtar’s *Musa Daggash: The Story of a Shuwa Arab Boy*, also constitutes another remaking, another permutation of the past as the real account of the subject is juxtaposed with the author’s perception so that a new entity is formed. In this sense, the documents selected for gathering information about the subject may be controlled principally by the author’s quest to represent the subject as perfect as possible so that objectivity will be grossly disarmed for the aim to represent the past as it really was will be defeated while a new reality re-situated will be presented.

The book follows a chronological structure, beginning with Daggash’s genealogy through his childhood and ending with his death in 1997. This follows a similar pattern that was in vogue in the Victorian biographies in England. Mukhtar’s biography also follow a formula of lengthy chronological narrative just the novels of the Victorian era. Lee (2009:62) reports that the stories told during the Victorian era were of public achievement, professional challenges, friendships, travel, battles, political dilemmas, or crises of faith, childhood problems, domestic privacies, affairs and scandals were played down. She emphasised that the main characters in these biographies were politicians and statesmen, military or naval heroes, churchmen, writers and teachers. The tone of the narratives is reported to have been serious and uncritical.

Similarly, in Mukhtar’s biography, all the phases in the life of the subject are given significant treatment. There is adequate information concerning his family and early childhood background through to his working career. In all these phases, Daggash is eminently captured as a hero and

an outstanding statesman of high moral and intellectual shrewdness. While working as a Forestry Assistant, Mr. W.A. Fairbain is reported to have commented on Daggash thus:

Forestry Assistant, Musa Daggash, is a clever and intelligent worker and has intelligence far above the average product of the Nigerian schools. He is very interested in the practical application of forestry and has shown ability in carrying out the work entrusted to him. He is an apt pupil with a distinct aptitude and leaning towards Silvicultural and experimental work (77).

This comment which comes at the beginning of the fourth chapter that ushers us into the public life of Musa Daggash. In this remark, the biographer is seemingly trying to designate Daggash as an astute personality that commands respect during his working career. Mukhtar reports that Daggash was again highly recommended for employment as a forestry official by one of his teachers Mr. Dundas who remarked thus: “by far and away the best and most intelligent student in the class. First in the mid-term examination with 66% should make excellent forestry officer. Consequently, Musa Daggash was medically examined and passed fit for government service on 10 June, 1938 by the Zaria Medical Officer” (81). This marked the beginning of what Mukhtar will describe as Daggash’s illustrious working career. During his service as a Forester, Fairbain again would recommend Musa Daggash for a higher rank in the following words: “Musa Daggash is a youth who well merits appointment on probation as a Technical Assistant” (85). This indicates the idea that Daggash was distinguished for greatness for greatness in his career that would attract admiration by his well wishers.

The common feature associated with Mukhtar’s account of his subject is the idolizing principle he adopts to recreate the life of Musa Daggash as a celebration of one legendary figure and statesman in northern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria at large. Though his awareness to remain neutral and ethical to the requirements of a good biography has seen him allow others to perform the duty of extolling the legendary and exploits of his subject. But while doing this, the

biographer strives to present to us glimpse into the personality of his subject even as Lee (2009:6) insists that the biographer has a responsibility to the truth and should tell us what actually happened in the life of his subject.

Consequently, throughout chapter four of his work, Mukhtar has given us detailed information about Daggash regarding his exploits and escapades while working as a forester. What we however learn about the subject is someone who is determined to excel at every point in his assignment. Wherever he had worked the biographer points out both landmarks and administrative successes that placed him above others. While serving in Adamawa where Agricultural Officer for Yola served as his supervisor, he rated him highly as captured by Mukhtar in these words: “during the period that Mallam Musa has been stationed in Adamawa, he has shown ability and keenness in his work which I consider to be outstanding for a man of his rank” (89).

It is to be learnt later that while serving in Adamawa for a duration of thirtyfour months, Daggash succeeded in establishing ‘a viable Forestry Department throughout the length and breadth of the province’ (90). According to the biographer, Daggash established tree seedling nurseries in all the divisional headquarters and major towns in the region. As part of his achievements in the region, Mukhtar recounts that “Musa Daggash introduced the eucalyptus tree to Mambilla Plateau, where it has since then developed into the chief source of timber for the people. To demonstrate the subject’s commitment and dedication to duty, Mukhtar says:

Unlike the present Nigerian trend whereby lack of proper supervision from an officer’s superior often leave room for laxity and malingering. Musa Daggash even as a Forest Assistant III under the slightest monitoring put up his utmost best to get things done (91).

To substantiate his position succinctly, Mukhtar quoted Mr. F.T. Brand, the Acting Chief Conservator, North East Forest circle who summed up his assessment of Musa Daggash in the following words:

“He is an able forest assistant of good bearing and fine character who has been equal to all demands and has been consistently well reported upon by the Agricultural Officer Yola, throughout a long period in Adamawa when inspections have been few” (92).

This quotation does not only extol the sterling qualities of the subject but it can also be inferred here the extent to which the biographer has researched about his subject to help recount his life experiences to the reader. This is to satisfy Lee’s assertion that the biographer should be able to report the real life history of his subject. The mono-linear coverage of his glamorous life is later truncated when Mukhtar chips in a particular moment when Musa Daggash was found infuriated and threatens a confrontation with a white man who was the Agricultural Development Officer provoked him. Consequently, “Musa Daggash abused the hell out of Adam and also warned him that if ever he entered his camp again, he would cause the labourers under him to beat him” (100).

Daggash was later reported to the British government but as Mukhtar would present it, no concrete disciplinary action was taken against him. This can be attributed to Daggash’s glowing performance and administration of his duties. His exemplary life is also attested to when he decides on his own to enroll one of his friends’ children in school without the latter’s knowledge. However, based on the mutual trust reported to have existed between the two, the latter accepted the decision in good faith. Incidentally, the boy, Bunu, turned out to be a bright individual who later read engineering as a profession that later earned him a ministerial position in Babangida’s administration. This has also shown the level of Daggash’s commitment to the development of his society. Engineer Bunu Sherrif Musa also speaks fondly of Daggash as he has this to say:

Musa Daggash was a good friend of my father and loved spending evenings with my father. My father, being the conservative Muslim he was, had no plans to enroll me into any school, until one day in 1951 Musa Daggash came to our house and took me...to the primary school and had me registered in my father's absence (104).

This episode apart from portraying the philanthropic life of the Daggash also deepens the biographer's attempt to recount the life of the subject with adequate factual details as possible. This is in line with the biographical feature which demands the total coverage of the subject's life as Parke (2009:73) would proposed that biography should "hang up mirrors at all angles to reorient habitual lines of sight". This entails however, that biography should be able to cover the entire life of the subject including the bad and good aspects of such a life. It means therefore that biography ought to be chronological from cradle to the grave.

However, Lee (2009:8) argues that this requirement has been so often broken as not to count. She states that biographies can run backwards, can be reorganised by themes, can choose to dwell on certain key moments in a life or can be inter-cut their narratives with passages of history, literary criticism, description or autobiography.

In Mukhtar's biography, in order to maintain chronological preservation of the life of his subject, he has created themes that allow him freedom to capture certain events at a serial proportion in the life of his subject. The working career of the subject provides him with a serial coverage of his life with almost minute detail and accuracy. The biography has provided the reader with adequate information concerning the subject at every given moment of his career. For instance, while working in Bornu state, it is reported that he was also responsible for the planting of neem tree in the area which has imparted positively on the daily lives of the people. While in Bornu, his "outstanding qualities and commitment to duty on several occasions had turned him into either a pioneer or restorer"(112). The service to his home province paved way for his

nomination and selection for refresher course in the United Kingdom in 1950-1951. This shows his level of commitment and integrity in the discharge of his duties.

As earlier stated elsewhere above, Daggash's life is portrayed by the biographer as someone who has a proven life style of integrity. He is always committed to ensure that the right thing is done for the benefit of the system and not just for his selfish interest. Mukhtar states that while Daggash was in London for a course, he "made a good impression on all who have had contact with him" (117). He has presented him as someone who is liberal and resolute in his decisions. According to the Mukhtar, his liberal style was instructive in his decision to send his young children to Abeokuta in the early 1950s. The decision to send the children to a far way Abeokuta is interpreted by Mukhtar as an expression of his personality as "someone unencumbered by ethic or sectional chauvinism to interact with and trust his fellow countrymen from wherever they come from" (121).

However, while serving in Zaria in 1951 as Assistant Conservator of Forest, Mukhtar reports that his "relations with some NA officials started getting strained, necessitating him to request for either transfer from the province altogether or provision of an alternative accommodation in the GRA Quarters of the town" (122). What is puzzling to the reader however is that Mukhtar has failed to inform the reader what or who was responsible for this strained relationship. It can be assumed that the reasons must have been incriminating against his subject for which he chooses to remain silent about it. He would shortly inform us the reader about the compelling personality of his subject when the Queen of England, Elizabeth II visited Nigeria. Mukhtar in order to portray how influential his subject was states: "During Queen Elizabeth II's royal visit to Nigeria in 1955/1956, Musa Daggash was among the few eminent northern Nigerians specially invited to a luncheon party hosted in honour of her majesty in Kaduna" (124).

This portrayal has a coercive tone that invites every reader to assume the personality of the subject as a noble one who is loved and hailed by everyone. This is demonstrated by the Chief Conservator of Forests in Kaduna who wrote the Resident in Katsina on Musa's proposed transfer to Katsina in a rather assuring tone: "I can assure that Mallam Musa Daggash is a very pleasant officer and gets on well with everyone. He recently accompanied His Honour as interpreter to Maiduguri" (125). The Chief Conservator's remark as reported by the biographer rather complicates his personal opinion as to why Daggash sought transfer away from Zaria. This is because by logical conclusion, it is possible that if he can get along well with everybody, the strained relationship would not have arisen.

However, whatever that would have been the reason for the gulf in his transfer story, the point the biographer asserts in his presentation is one that invites us to regard Daggash as a no ordinary person but someone who was influential in his society throughout his life time. His services, for instance, have always endeared him to his superior, the Chief Conservator of Forests, Northern Region, who wrote that "in conducting inquiries in connection with reserve constitution, he has been successful. His natural good manners have been a great asset in such situation" (127).

Musa Daggash avers that a certain section of his reserve constitution report did not go down well with some of the British officers in Zaria. Mukhtar states that in writing the report, Daggash was bold enough to criticize some aspects of the indirect rule system, and for this Daggash cautioned to remove the purported offensive language from the report. And in response Daggash told his boss to extract it himself since he, as a boss could use his discretion to alter any submission made by his subordinates (127). This could be attributed to be responsible to his strained relationship with the Zaria office. The manner of his reaction to his superiors is rather a conscious effort to demonstrate Daggash level of his integrity in the discharge of his duties by the biographer. The

reader is to learn from this daring confrontation with Daggash's superiors, the height of his commitment and selfless service marked by integrity.

These qualities of integrity, transparency and selflessness were to later earn him the trust of the colonial authorities to appoint him as an interpreter to Lt-Governor Sir Bryan Sherwood Smith during one of his visits to Bornu. Mukhtar reports:

To facilitate his Borno mission, Sir Bryan requested for a competent but non-partisan interpreter, preferably a son of Borno, perhaps to allay any suspicion that he was in Borno to disgrace the Shehu and his people. Musa Daggash, who at the time was an assistant conservator of forests at Zaria, made an ideal choice for the colonial authorities in Kaduna (133).

According to the biographer, part of the reasons for the adoption of Daggash for this mission is above all, the consideration that he is "a person of strong character" who being mostly away from the province must have less prone to local politics and thought to be forthright in telling both the Shehu and the Lt-Governor whatever the other had to say in the course of the meeting. This instance is again is the author's commitment towards eulogising as well as depicting the subject as someone of impeccable character who is capable of inspiring the reader towards imbibing an exemplary attributes.

In the course of his assignment to the meeting between Shehu and Sir Bryan, Daggash is also reportedly demonstrated his genius while interpreting Shehu's rantings that would have stirred problem for the Shehu. He tactically advised the Shehu to rethink the implications of his abuses to the colonial administrator if Sir Bryan hears of them. This also endeared him to the people. Muktar, in this episode draws our attention to the diplomacy as well as the fairness and transparency Daggash is noted for.

As it is normally the case with biographies, a large portion of Mukhtar's narrative about the life of Musa Daggash has been an exploration into the epic life of his subject. While he has

intermittently punctuated with some moments of weakness in the life of the subject, it is the glamour in his character and personality that dominates the narrative. By the time Daggash finally moves from Zaria to Katsina, he took over as forest officer. The account of his stewardship in Katsina office reads thus: “within the first six months of his taking charge of the department, Musa Daggash completed five forest reserves that were started before his arrival and he surveyed, demarcated, inspected and constituted thirtyfive community forest areas” (138).

Following his relentless service to the region, by the time Daggash sought transfer away from Katsina following the furious crisis between the forest department and Funtua district, the emir as well as the residents discouraged him “because of his great ability and services to the province” (142). Again, his influences in the forestry establishment across the northern region got him appointed to put up a forest school to be located at Jos. He was later to be appointed as the first officer of the school. Mukhtar captures his exploits at the school in the following words: “Alhaji Musa did not leave Naraguta without implanting his imprint: a landmark that has remained visible even today” (143).

By the time Daggash transfer his service to public administration, Mukhtar reports that he did not find any difficulty in changing over to his new career due to is accumulated years of excellent performance and commitment to service. During his time in the administrative cycle, it is reported that Daggash served and performed excellently. His first few months in Lagos were welcomed with contempt by Lagosians for a possible discrimination against northern workers for illiteracy. This actually earned him derogatory names until he proved his detractors otherwise. Muktar states that when Daggash was promoted to the rank of permanent secretary, he was transferred to the Ministry of Mines and Power where Yusuf Maitama Sule was in charge as the minister. Maitama Sule avers that the “dedication selfless service and honesty of Alhaji Musa

Daggash” and others contributed tremendously in the foundation of Nigeria’s Petroleum Industry (159).

Mukhtar also stressed that “under the farsighted stewardship of Alhaji Maitama Sule and Daggash...great strides were made in other areas of energy and mining as well. The biographer also links Daggash to have played a pivotal role in the construction of Kainji Dam. He stressed that “at all the initial phase of the scheme, Alhaji Musa Daggash visited Kainji almost on monthly basis to clear any administrative problem relating to land and finance matters” (163).

All this incredible portraiture is to draw the reader’s attention to the noble contribution of the subject in Nigeria’s national life. Even though the conception of the Kainji Dam predates his entry into administration generally, the role he had played while serving in the Ministry of Mines and Power is vividly captured to stress his role in the Nigeria’s key developmental projects. In order to stress his fairness and transparency, the biographer emphasised that this once put him at odds with the Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello. This follows when the Northern Regional Government approached then federal with the idea of establishing a cement factory at Sokoto. However, geologists after a feasibility study advised that it was economically imprudent to start a cement factory at Sokoto at the time. Consequently, as the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Mines and Power, on the basis of the technical advice provided by the experts in the ministry, Daggash wrote a memo suggesting that all feasibility studies carried out in the northern region indicated that establishing a cement factory at Gboko was the wisest thing to do, because the limestone at Sokoto contained high amount of impurities and needed a great deal of refining to bring it to a usable state comparable to cements produced elsewhere in the world.

This situation according to the Mukhtar sparked a misunderstanding between the northern leaders. This is to present to the reader, the fearless and impartial nature of Daggash in the

discharge of his duties. For him to have confronted the premier without fear of being punished shows that he was a kind of person that is always determined to do that which is right without any recourse to the sentiments and politics that may have accompanied any decision. It is interesting to learn later that the premier's "annoyance became clear when he reported Musa Daggash to the prime minister, who in return drew Alhaji Yusuf Maitama Sule's attention to the issue" (164).

According to the biographer, the minister somehow defended the action of his permanent secretary and the matter was left to die out like that" (165). It can be inferred that both of these distinguished northerners were actually committed to a just and egalitarian Nigeria. They were not easily swayed by the ovature of their office and influence to win favour for their individual and selfish benefits. This is the tacitmessage we can easily read from this whole episode. As part of demonstrating Daggash's dedication to duty, Mukhtar presents to us an incident on a day prior to first military takeover when Daggash has to take some files home and worked overnight. He therefore proceeded to the office very early in the morning while many were away for fear of military harassment. His fearlessness and confidence when he was confronted by the military would later earn him a prominent place in the government of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi as the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence:

On about 22 February 1966, when things started to calm down, Mr. S.Olabode Wey, Secretary to the Federal Military Government, phoned to inform Alhaji Musa Daggash that the Head of State and Supreme Commander had directed that he...should leave his post at the mines and power and move to the Ministry of Defence (169).

According to Mukhtar, Aguiyi Ironsi's reason for this decision was that "when everybody was running away you were going to work. Therefore you must be a bit different from others" (169). Accordingly, we can equally conclude here that Daggash's mark of dedication and commitment to his work was remarkable to win the trust of the military government.

There is a ubiquitous exposition about the heroic deeds of the subject. The hallmark of Mukhtar's biography seems to be the celebration of the life of the subject. Perhaps this may account for the continuous exploration into the heroic and exemplary life of the subject. At every instance especially in Daggash's working career, the biographer is fascinated about his dedication and commitment to his duty.

The subject is vigorously presented as someone who was always focused on the right things to be done irrespective of whoever is involved. This display of integrity has always seen him confronting his superiors when things go the way he knew was wrong. While serving as the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence, he had to confront the Head of State, General Aguiyi Ironsi when he read an article that was targeted at the premier of the northern region where Daggash felt the premier was ridiculed:

Alhaji Musa Daggash went back to Aguiyi Ironsi and raised that same subject. This time the head of state started shouting at [him] and arguing that he had already given directives to the Attorney –General for the arrest of Coz Idapo...what am I to do if the Attorney-General refused to detain him...Alhaji Musa Daggash, flatly replied, anybody failing to act on the directives of the head of state, he too should detained (172).

This episode is a demonstration of how bold Daggash could be in the pursuit of what he felt was right. It can be inferred here that to Daggash, reason should be considered above mere pliancy. This is evident in the fall out between him and the Head of State, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi following the Sardauna's case as well as the instance when he was completely ignored while more than fifteen Igbo speaking military officers in 1966 were promoted.

To highlight the place of Daggash in the political history of Nigeria, Mukhtar writes that after the 1966 military coup, that saw the demise of Aguiyi Ironsi, Daggash and other senior permanent secretaries were very influential in the selection of the next Head of State:

This was a period in which Alhaji Musa Daggash in particular and other senior permanent secretaries found themselves at a critical moment, hinging on the survival of Nigeria as a united country. Indeed, with the assassination of the Head of State during the Ibadan mutiny...everything revolved around the Ministry of Defence, and inevitably around Alhaji Musa Daggash as the Permanent Secretary of the ministry. His position in the Ministry of Defence gave him some authority which no Permanent Secretary from other ministry wielded at the time (176).

In the foregoing excerpt, the reader is presented with a noble role Daggash played in the transition from Ironsi's administration to the emergence of the next Head of State. The reader even learns that after the death of Aguiyi Ironsi, there was a three day power vacuum that saw Daggash serving more or less as the president. The time Gowon emerged the Head of State, Daggash is noted to have continuously stressed to the Head of State that "there is no reason whatsoever, to break up Nigeria" (179). This by implication is to say that Daggash was one of those behind General Gowon's pursuance of the Nigeria's unity in the civil war. Daggash is quoted to have offered several word of advice to the young Gowon as the Head of State. For instance, when General Murtala Muhammad appeared to have been interrupting Gowon's speech in one of their meetings, he reprimanded Muhammad and had this to say to Gowon:

You are the most senior northern officer in the Nigeria army. Whether we like it or not this is a military regime and there has to be some military discipline. Don't allow yourself to be disrespected by officers below you. You are the senior; you are therefore, the one who should give them orders and not the other way round (181).

The unequivocal advice is also reported to have stirred more courage in the young Gowon and maintained decorum that kept Murtala Muhammad away from subsequent meetings. Mukhtar reports that when Gowon finally emerged the Head of State, he offered to make Daggash the post of secretary to the Federal Military Government based largely on his seniority and because of his fairness. However, Daggash reportedly turned down the offer and recommended another person for the post. Daggash continuously used his experience in the civil service to advice General Gowon on several key decisions bothering on the progress of Nigeria as a country:

On concluding that Lt.-Colonel Ojukwu was bent on excising the Eastern region from the federation and considering his insubordination to Gowon, Alhaji Musa Daggash and some fellow permanent secretaries advised the head of state to stop phoning Ojukwu. When the head of state refused to heed to the advice...Alhaji Musa Daggash confronted him..and told Gowon that “look ten of us here have an average of forty years each. Forty times ten, four hundred years of experience is wrong and you a young man of thirty-one is right? (183).

It is clear from the above that Daggash with his wealth of experience did not at any point waver in giving a word of advice to the Head of State. This in essence, shows his influence and relevance in most of the military government in Nigeria.

However, one thing most noticeable in this narrative is that the biographer’s admiration of his subject is not separable from the real account of the subject’s life. It is quite obvious that the subject was really committed to live a just and amiable life worthy of emulation wherever he works, the account of his life immortalised in this biography is rather preconceived so that the character of the subject is purely seen from the perspective of the biographer. Even though he has punctuated the narrative with intermittent squabble with several people at different occasions, these squabbles are strictly based on promoting his illustrious and impeccable character and integrity. This can be seen in an incident where Daggash refused to sign what he considered a fraudulent voucher from a military officer, Shittu Alao who upon getting it signed by the Head of State, returned it to Daggash to ridicule him. Daggash thus, replied him thus: “the Head of State could as well give him the entire country if he so wished but he was only abiding by his oath of allegiance and insisting on following the normal procedure of doing things. Therefore, there was no way he could bend the rule for the sake of Alao” (186).

This to a large extent is a way of demonstrating Daggash’s level of integrity. This does not actually portray him committing an infringement against any party involved. Mukhtar even stressed that while working in the Ministry of Transport, “Alhaji Musa succeeded in maintaining

harmony between government and labour union within the ministry (187). Even after his retirement from active service, it is reported that based on his impeccable character, he continued to serve the country in different capacities. Mukhtar states that when the newly created Corporations Standing Tenders Boards (CSTB) was established, Daggash retired as Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transport to take over as its chairman. While quoting Daggash, Mukhtar says: “Musa emphasised that General Gowon actually appealed to his ego, by insisting that the responsibility of heading the CSTB was the type of work that the head of state could entrust only to people like Daggash” (206).

While serving as the first chairman of the board, Barclays Bank, Mukhtar revealed that “as a retired public officer, Alhaji Musa Daggash had left a reputation that he was a symbol of integrity and wide experience...[He] was therefore the kind of person that any bank would be proud of as a rallying point for integrity” (209). The time the curtain fell on the regime of General Gowon on 29 July, 1975, it is reported that many civil servants suffered the agony of Murtala Muhammad’s anti-corruption crusade. The biographer opined that “the transparency and commitment to duty of Alhaji Musa Daggash must have contributed in sparing him from the agony that many of his contemporaries had to pass through as a result of the purging of the entire civil service by the regime”(216).

In Mukhtar’s *Musa Daggash: The Story of a Shuwa Arab Boy*, one thing most noticeable is his proclivity with his subject. The information gathered about the subject is either lopsided or significantly sourced from his close allies so that the account of his life is perceived from less neutral sources. This has however, made the work significantly an acclamation of the subject’s life than a true life historical account. The work inundates the reader with adequate historical details about the subject. However, the reader is coerced into acceptable behavioural patterns and

life style of Daggash and consciously or unconsciously skips the unsavoury attributes of his life that would have balanced the story of his life. Throughout the narrative, the mood the reader is lured into is one that identifies him with the subject as a superman who was committed to a just life that invites his celebration even long after his death. Accordingly, the author consciously or unconsciously, largely remains silent about the other side of his life thus leaving the narrative lopsided and limiting it purely to his primary intention of celebrating him as a hero.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

This study has been a critical attempt to investigate biography as a viable tool for the celebration of life against death. This critical discourse interrogates the primary texts to determine the extent to which biographical works generally and the primary texts in particular can be unequivocally regarded as a tool for an authentic preservation of one's life after death. The study particularly focused on the ideological perspective from which the lives of the subjects are presented whilst interrogating the biographers' context in documentation of their subjects. The task of any biographer has always been an unwieldy ethical challenge at representing the life of his subject to balance his narrative as one objective account of one whose life is capable of influencing the present and the future generation positively. This entails therefore, that the biographer to meet the objectivity demanded of him in recreating the life of the subject has to penetrate all aspects of his subject's life including politics, social relations, economics, culture, ancestry, kinship, family, sexuality, psychology and friendship. By so doing, the biographer is likely expected to present the reader with a fuller account of the subject.

In this study however, the choice to investigate the biographers' psychology while presenting the lives of their subject became imperative since every writer is guided by an impulse and influence on how his or her subject should be presented. In each of the primary texts therefore, each author proves his love of writing about the life of his subject as well as a dedication to writing well as demonstrated in their thorough research and concern with applying ethical standards to their works. Each of these biographers proves that he is aware of the standards expected of him to accomplish a decent biography balanced on objective recreation and reportage. Their stylistic and technical expertise is also evident. This is demonstrated by their use of flashbacks and flash forwards to enhance the effects of time and place and the climatic mood created when they try to

build upon the events of their subjects' lives to reveal what they are experiencing at any given time.

Indeed, both authors strive to equip the reader with a fairly adequate account of his subject beginning with their ancestry and genealogy which provides the reader with a good background of the subjects. The narratives achieve a sequential chronology of the events in the life of their subjects, right up to the moment of their death. However, as regards their social relations, the biographers are observed to be fascinated by the sublime and rich profiles of their subjects thus presenting their subjects' lives devoid of any reproach. This more or less flaunts their narratives with hagiographic outlook and mood rather than an objective biography aimed at simply recreating a life once lived to the reader as was truly lived.

This is particularly noticeable in *Integrity and Service: The Life and Times of Ahmadu Coomasie* where the subject's son is a co-author. While it becomes obvious as one reads through the life of Ahmadu Coomasie as someone who had achieved greatness through his exemplary leadership style marked famously by integrity, the presentation of his life is smeared by acute exaggeration as hardly one come across any moment where he has erred and failed to impress the people around him and even the reader with outstanding display in both public and private life. One attribute deployed to balance their glorious account of the subject has been an emphasis on his addiction to smoking. The account of Coomasie as presented by the authors however, contrasts the popular saying that "Nobody is Perfect". The narrative thus becomes questionable as to whether it is a biography or a mere eulogy presented from the perspective of the authors as part of their tribute to the subject. However, the need for a deeper penetration of the subject's life is captured in the second part of the title: "The Life and Times of Ahmadu Coomasie". This therefore prepares the reader to meet the totality of Coomasie's life story.

It is indeed, in Muktar's account of Musa Daggash that an attempt is made by the biographer to balance the narrative with some actions that had the subject in bizarre confrontation with other people as opposed to Dahiru and Sani's presentation of Ahmadu Coomasie. Even in Muktar's representation of Daggash misdeeds, he would critically exploit those moments and incidents to his subject's glory and exhortation as consequences of threats to his integrity and what he believes was right. The implication of the primary authors' portrayal of their subjects is that the fondness and admiration of biographers to their subjects control and shape the ideological perspective behind their narratives even as they strive to maintain ethical standards required of a perfect biographical account. It is observed that in as much as both authors attempt to portray their biographical subjects objectively, the narratives end up been presented as they exist in their minds and not possibly as they exist in the mind of others. However, accurate record of biographical subjects is always potentially of great use and certainly of more engaging interest to the reading public.

Nevertheless, from the analysis of the texts, it is quite imperative to state that biography functions as a medium which can be translated into an imaginative presence spirits of the distant or the dead. It actually reanimates the biographical subject's personality as central to the task of examining their springs of experiences to shape the life of the reader though familiar notions of greatness are understood to carry, the biases of the dominant culture's institutional and ideological values as presented by biographers. What is most noticeable is that biography permits and even requires an iconoclastic examination by authorising the biographer's projections into the life of his subject. Though the potential liability that enervates this strength is that subjects in these writings lose the dramatic savour of their individuality in the biographical narrative as it is evident in the depiction of the subjects in the primary texts.

The biographic portraiture of the subjects in the primary texts shows the biographers' commitment towards the recreation of their subject as a celebration of life after death. The narratives are fraught with tributary accounts that depict and bring the subjects back into the consciousness of the reader. Their descriptions move back and forth between the family life in both private and public service. The perspective from which both characters are presented suggests the principal aim of the authors as been to correct narrow stereotypes about them as well as portraying them as extraordinarily versatile and nationally influential as statesmen of repute and integrity.

However, these attempts underscore certainly the biographers' frankness and responsible authority over their subjects who remain heroes of achievement if not of self-conscious lucidity. Their compelling zest to celebrate the subject veered them into unconscious orders to present a certain life to the world that is concealed as much as it is revealed. This is largely because of the idea that biography after Freud, even those that do not undertake a technical psychoanalytic examination of their subject identifies the subject's chief characterising lack as the biographer's fortunate opportunity and defining responsibility for inquiry and representation of a true life lived or once lived. The subject's weakness supposedly becomes the biographer's rhetorical authority and point of entry into the complete life of his subject even in an attempt to celebrate such a life after death.

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