## Contents

List of Illustrations xi
Acknowledgements xii
Introduction xiii

1 Literary Biography Now and Then 1
   *The Cinderella of Literary Studies* 1
   *The Rise and Rise of Literary Biography* 4
   *Dr Johnson: Biographer, Theorist and Subject* 7
   *Virginia Woolf: Time, Memory and Identity* 12

2 Life [Hi]Stories: Telling Tales 18
   *Aspects of Narrative* 18
     (i) Beginnings: Charlotte Brontë 19
     (ii) Middles: Thomas Hardy 21
     (iii) Endings: Jane Austen 25
   *The Naked Biographer* 28
   *Inventing the Truth* 30

3 Reading Biography 35
   *Biographer, Biography and the Reader* 35
   *Imagining Blake* 38
   *Problems of a Hybrid Form* 42
   *Reading Lessons* 45

4 Literary Biomythography 47
   *Biomythography* 47
   *Myth-Making: The Brontë Paradigm* 48
## Contents

(i) Facts: Selection and ‘Spin’ 49  
(ii) Fact into Fiction 50  
(iii) Fiction into Myth 50  
(iv) Myth into ‘Faction’ 51  
(v) Demythologising the Brontës 52

### Variations on the Theme

(i) Byron 54  
(ii) Dickens 55  
(iii) Sylvia Plath 58

### Conclusions

63

5 Inferential Biography: Shakespeare the Invisible Man 67

### Virtual Shakespeares

(i) The Facts 68  
(ii) The Theatrical Context 69  
(iii) The Social Context 71  
(iv) The Shakespeare Mythos 72  
(v) The Shakespeare Canon 73

### The Implied Author: Inferential Biography

(i) The Art of Love: *The Sonnets* 75  
(ii) Prejudice, Discrimination and the Law: *The Merchant of Venice* 77  
(iii) War and the Politics of Nationhood: *Henry V* 79  
(iv) Language and Thinking: *Hamlet* 82  
(v) Art and Artifice: *The Tempest* 85

### The Limits of Imagination

87

6 Literary Biography and Portraiture 92

### Sister Arts

(i) Biography and Portraiture: Reynolds’s Portrait of Dr Johnson 94  
(ii) Reading the Image: Cassandra Austen’s Sketch of Jane Austen 96  
(iv) Celebrity Image: Thomas Phillips’s Portrait of Byron in Albanian Dress 100  
(v) Visual Memoir: Joseph Severn’s Portrait of John Keats 102
Contents ix

(vi) Bardography: The Chandos Portrait of Shakespeare 104
(vii) The Inner Life: R. W. Buss’s Dickens’s Dream 106
(viii) Sisters’ Arts: Vanessa Bell’s Portrait of Virginia Woolf 108
(ix) ‘To prepare a face …’: Patrick Heron’s Portrait of T. S. Eliot 110
(x) Branwell’s Ghost: Branwell Brontë’s Portrait of his Three Sisters 112

Art to Order 114

7 Comparative Biography: Dickens’s ‘Lives’ 117

The Victorian Dickens 118
The Modern Dickens 121
The Post-Modern Dickens 125
Lives and Times 130

8 Literary Auto/Biography 132

Acts of Self-Creation in Wordsworth and Joyce 132
Wordsworth’s ‘biographic verse’ 134
Joyce’s ‘artist, like the God of creation’ 143
Masks and Metaphors 149

9 Biography in Practice 152

An Interview with Dominic Hibberd, author of Wilfred Owen: A New Biography 152
Living with the Subject 153
Imagining Wilfred 157
Matters of Life and Death 166

10 Authorised Lives 171

The Life of Graham Greene by Norman Sherry 172
Bernard Shaw by Michael Holroyd 176
T. S. Eliot by Peter Ackroyd 181
Orwell: The Life by D. J. Taylor 186
Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life by Andrew Motion 192
Contemporary Lives 199

11 Literary Lives: Scenes and Stories 202

Dinner with Dr Johnson and John Wilkes 203
Dinner with Mrs Ramsay 208
Biography and Fiction 215
x Contents

12 Biography and the Future 218

Select Bibliography 225

  Further Reading 225
  General Bibliography 229

Index 239