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“Remaking Obscure Lives as Prosopography in Blogazine”

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In “The Lives of the Obscure,” Virginia Woolf suggests that obscure lives are important for recovering silenced histories (120). These “obscure lives” gain their significance not by Victorian notions of individual “greatness” but by their collective worth of historicity. Hermione Lee points out that the shift from a “single, dominant figure” to multiple, minor figures was the reason for the recent popularity of “group” lives, which “uncover a past we might otherwise miss” (126). This essay proposes that these obscure lives find their incarnation as digital prosopography in blogazine.

Prosopography, according to Alison Booth, is another term for “collective biography” (72), which emphasizes “communal rites” to “collect and reanimate dead ancestors” (74). Collective biography or prosopography is a collection of short biographies in a volume or in a website that are thematically linked. Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* is an example. These short, eulogistic narratives of obscure lives target general readers, democratizing traditional notions of biographical form (75). They find a new incarnation in a hybrid of online blog and magazine, blogazine, in the twentieth century. This digital form of prosopography conflates the distinction between autobiography and biography and presents a mixed and collective account of lives brought together by their common characteristics. Contrary to traditional biographies that commemorate saints, aristocrats, and celebrities as “greatness” and dismiss

common civilians as “smallness,” digital prosopography subverts the notions of “greatness” and “smallness.” It offers ordinary women channels to commemorate unsung heroines in their memory, leaving traceable accounts of ordinary lives.

Biographical critics are both intrigued and perplexed by new digital media such as the blogazine. Booth observes that short versions of lives have begun to gain more public attention, but “little systematic criticism considers the form and rhetoric of life-writing that interconnects and aligns multiple personae” (95). The “Life” section in the blogazine *The Pool* is an example. Women’s (auto)biographical narratives are arranged and collected under certain themes in this section, such as “Parenting Honestly,” “Love and Sex,” and “Life Honestly.” For instance, in “Life Honestly” a series on womanhood encompasses contributors’ reflections on their memories and the meanings of daughterhood, granddaughterhood, sisterhood, aunthood, and (single-)motherhood. The series creates a conflated form of digital prosopography by mixing memoir, autobiography, biography, and eulogy. In this blogazine, digital prosopography emerges as a democratized and hybrid cluster of women’s testimonies, archiving women’s histories in a contemporary form. Reading such narratives as prosopography allows us to trace collective practices of life writing as they evolve in digital forms.

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