

Psychobiography as a method. The revival of studying lives: New perspectives in personality and creativity research

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Abstract

Psychobiography was invented by Sigmund Freud while investigating the psychological determinants of Leonardo da Vinci's artistic creativity. Following the founder of psychoanalysis there were about 300 psychobiographic analyses published until 1960. From the 1930's psychoanalysis also influenced the unfolding personality psychology trend called personology in the USA, led by G. W. Allport and Henry A. Murray, who also worked with life stories. However, the major methodological problems of classic psychobiography and the rising of nomothetic approaches in personality research effaced studying lives between the 1950's and the 1980's. The narrative turn in psychology made life story analysis accepted and popular again, and from the 90's we can talk about "a renaissance of psychobiography". The new endeavors encompass psychoanalytical and personological traditions and also integrate narrative perspectives. Contemporary psychobiography is constantly widening its focus: not only artists, but scientists, political and historical figures are also analyzed with more explicit methodology and comparative proceedings. In addition to the fact that psychobiography is a qualitative research method, it is very useful in exploring the psychology of creativity and personality itself and hence can be used as an instrument to train psychology students and prepare them for practical activities like psychotherapy or consultations. With the application of psychobiography the knowledge about human functioning and self-awareness is deepening, since it can be viewed as a practical realization of hermeneutical dialogue leading to the understanding of the human mind.

Keywords: psychobiography, psychoanalysis, personology, creativity, personality research, education of psychologists, dialogue.

Introduction

The much contested method called psychobiography has now a century-long history: Freud published his groundbreaking essay on Leonardo da Vinci in 1910 (Freud, 1957). This approach became popular mainly within psychoanalysts who cultivated psychology of arts as a secondary interest: about 300 similar articles were published until 1960 and these works also heavily influenced literary criticism (Kraft, 1998). Psychobiography did not remain the interior case of psychoanalysis. The idiographic approach in personality research studying life stories called personology became widespread in the United States from the 1930's by the works of G. W. Allport (1980) and Henry A. Murray (2008) and their disciples. Allport himself emphasized that life story has to be the starting point for every other research method in the investigation of personality. However, in the second half of the last century the nomothetic approach – which studies and formulates the general or universal laws - became hegemonic within personality psychology and, as a consequence, psychoanalytic and personological traditions were relegated in the background, rendering psychobiography an „out of favor” method for decades (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Runyan, 1997).

Though critiques of the nomothetic perspective were already rising in the 1970's ("Where is the person in personality research?" – asked Rae Carlson in 1971), dramatic changes only appeared in the 80's and 90's, since after a „narrative turn” in psychology (László, 2008) life story analysis became more accepted in personality psychology and in applied psychology. After the spread of the narrative approach and contemporary psychodynamic self-theories (Karterud, Monsen, ed. 1999), psychobiographical research came to a kind of renaissance in psychoanalysis and in personality research as well (Anderson, 2003; McAdams, 1988, 2001; Elms, 1994, 2007; Runyan, 1997). Since 2005 the first synthesis of modern endeavors is already accessible (Schultz, 2005a).

This paper presents the theoretical, methodological and practical specificities of contemporary psychobiography with respect to its important historical antecedents. Besides personality psychological and psychoanalytic aspects it focuses on its importance in creativity research. There are numerous reasons for this: psychobiography, on one hand, arose from the psychoanalytic inquiry of artistic creativity (Blum, 2001), whereas on the other hand, from the second half of the 20th century, a lot of psychologists argued that normal personality functioning is strongly connected with creativity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; May, 1959; Maslow, 1999; Richards, 2006, Winnicott, 2005). Therefore, by learning how creativity works, we will be able to

define the conditions of healthy self-functioning. Finally, during my quest in studying the dynamics of creative process I have also turned to psychobiographic analyses (Kőváry, 2009a, 2009b). Using the elements of contemporary psychobiography I came to the conclusion that this method's outstanding significance not only lies within personality and creativity research but I also believe that the utilization of psychobiography in education can be very useful. In-depth life story analyses can help psychology students to further expand their knowledge about the human mind and behavior by integrating and using psychological attainments. Given that this work is a dialogue an encounter with the other, it is a good chance for deepening empathic skills and self-awareness.

Historical antecedents of psychobiography

Psychobiography – just like its theoretical and methodological foundation, psychoanalysis – had not come into existence out of thin air: it has very important and identifiable antecedents. One of them is the biographical literature based upon pioneering works by Plutarch (45-125 AD.), who focused on political and historical figures. The interest for the life and the personality of artists appeared much later in the 16th century (Wittkower & Wittkower, 2006). Giorgio Vasari, who probably invented the word “renaissance”, published his book, *Lives of the Artists* was published in 1550 (Vasari, 1998); this book is often cited in the very first psychobiography, Sigmund Freud's Leonardo-essay. Biography writing reached its zenith in the 19th century, in the age of romanticism, a period that had a great intellectual influence on Freud's conception of creativity (Kőváry, 2011) and also led to the formation of modern hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1996). The heydays of biography writing were in the 19th century – wrote Hungarian publicist Aladár Schöpflin (1933). History was rediscovered and reformed, first to fantasize about it with romantic inspiration, then to create an uplifting collection of instances for the present, and finally to get to know it pragmatically by scientific methods.

If we talk about writing and analyzing life-stories, it's not easy to distinguish literature from psychology. Lohmann (2008) thinks that if we take a look at Freud's life work, it actually begins with a bundle of short stories (*Studies on hysteria*) and ends with a historical novel (*Moses and monotheism*). It's also notable, that the father of psychoanalysis was honored with the literary Goethe-prize of Frankfurt in 1930 (Schwielbusch, 1994). The demarcation is also complicated from the side of literature. The biographies written by Freud's friend Stefan Zweig, are filled with psychological insights, like his masterpiece *The struggle with the daemon* (2001) or even with psychoanalytic ideas, like his essay on Freud (1932). So we might agree with Fathali Moghaddam (2004), who emphasizes that it is practically impossible to

set a system of criteria that enables us to distinguish psychology clearly from literature.

The other source of psychobiography is a medical approach called pathography. Pathography, as Schioldann's (2003) defines it, is a "historical biography from a medical, psychological and psychiatric viewpoint. It analyses a single individual's biological heredity, development, personality, life history and mental and physical pathology, within the socio-cultural context of his/her time, in order to evaluate the impact of these factors upon his/her decision-making, performance and achievements" (2003, p. 303). Pathography is rooted in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, who underlined that there is an inherent connection between madness and genius. The first modern psychiatric approach, *La psychologie morbide dans ses rapport avec la philosophie de l'histoire ou l'influence des névropathies sur le dynamisme intellectuel* (*Psychopathology in connection with the philosophy of history or the effects of nervous illnesses on the dynamics of the intellect*) was written by Jacques-Joseph Moreau (de Tours) in 1859, in the great century of biography writing. This work had a great influence on the notorious author of *Genius and madness*, Cesare Lombroso who published his famous book in 1864. In turn, the concepts about degeneration by Lombroso (2000) and the Hungarian descent Max Nordau influenced the era's scientific standpoint and the advance of medical discourse (Foucault, 1984). The phrase "pathography", which is also mentioned in Freud's Leonardo-paper, was first used by German psychiatrist Paul Julius Möbius, who wrote several pathographies, for example about Rousseau, Goethe, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (Schioldann, 2003). In this respect, Ernst Kretschmer and Karl Jaspers are also notable; Jaspers for example published writings about Strindberg and Van Gogh (Bormuth, 2006).

Although Freud (1964) essentially denied philosophical inspirations, there are some doubtless similarities between psychoanalysis and the continental *Lebensphilosophie* of the late 19th century, concerning the role of studying the human individuum in an idiographic way and the importance of biographical approach. Wilhelm Dilthey, the founder of modern hermeneutics, in 1883 in his *Introduction to human sciences* emphasized the importance of studying the whole individuum's uniqueness, and he also designated the tool for this work. "Biography – he wrote - is "an important resource for the further development of a true *Realpsychologie*... One can regard the true work of the biographer as the application of the science of anthropology and psychology to the problem of bringing to life and making intelligible the nature, development and destiny of a life unit" (Dilthey, 1989, p. 85-86). Later (1894), in *Ideas concerning a descriptive and analytic psychology*, Dilthey claimed that in the 18th and 19th centuries, man had "created modern biography" for the understanding of

human evolution and “natural history of psychic life” (Dilthey, 1977, p. 105). Dilthey, through his disciple Eduard Spranger strongly influenced Gordon Allport, the pioneer of idiographic approach in personality psychology, who worked as a postdoc scholar in Germany in 1923 with Spranger (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003).

The other important connection to *Lebensphilosophie* is Friedrich Nietzsche. Freud's conceptions of creativity and the psychology of the artist – which are inherently related to the emergence of psychobiography – are showing some mysterious overlaps with Nietzsche's apprehension (Kőváry, 2011). According to Thomas Mann (1985), Agnes Heller (1994) and others, with the interpretation of an artist's (i.e. Richard Wagner's) personality Nietzsche tried to handle his deep emotional involvement and ambivalence towards the composer, whom he first admired, before becoming enemies. In explaining the psychology of the creative process (Nietzsche, 1994, 2001), the German philosopher used the same concepts (hypnosis, neurosis, hysteria, instinct, sublimation) as Freud did 15 years later. The origins of this obvious connection between the two thinkers have remained unsolved to this date (Bókay, 1995; Lohmann, 2008). In the quoted paper (Kőváry, 2011) I used the approach of “multiple case psychobiography” (see Isaacson, 2005) to reveal that the likeness of Freud's and Nietzsche's theories of artistic creativity might stem from the fact, that both formed their doctrines by an inquiry of the idealized Other (Leonardo and Wagner), who represented the ideal self and the father for both of them. Their investigations, which were psychological/psychobiographical studies, were based on the empathic identification with the Other (or, using a psychoanalytic phrase, transference to the Other), and both included implicit, in-depth analysis of the self. By this, Nietzsche and Freud both contributed to the modern hermeneutics of human subjectivity, which takes the unavoidable involvement of the researcher into account (Bókay, 1995; Dilthey, 2002; Steele, 1979). Later in the 20th century, some great findings in personality psychology were mostly attached to idiographic, hermeneutic approaches, life story analyses and studying single cases. It's not specific only to psychoanalysis: Murray, Erikson, Maslow and others formed their basic concepts about personality in the same way (Schultz, 2005b).

The birth of psychobiography: Freud's Leonardo-essay

We know through the reports written on the meetings of the *Vienna Psychoanalytic Society* that Freud believed that pathography couldn't provide any novel evidence about the examined person, most commonly about an artist (Mack, 1971). As Freud emphasized in the last chapter of his analysis of Jensen's *Gradiva* (Freud, 1959), he was more interested in answering the question: where was the poetic material

coming from, what are origins of the writer's spontaneous knowledge of the depths of the human soul? His essay on Leonardo was not the only effort to investigate the enigma of the artist. Some years later he wrote a short analysis about Goethe (1955) then about Dostoevsky (1961), but these writings are not approaching the level of significance and influence of *Leonardo da Vinci and a memory of his childhood*.

This essay created a new genre in psychology, but it has been seriously criticized to date. The analysis is based on the so called „vulture fantasy” that Freud explicated by one detail of Leonardo's diary. That particular note is the only one that tells something about the artist's childhood, according to which a vulture supposedly flew on Leonardo's cradle and stabbed his mouth with its tail. Freud, by his analytic experiences and his knowledge about Egyptian mythology, created an exciting and coherent narrative on Leonardo's psychosexual development. Freud believed that the characteristics of this event unambiguously influenced the Renaissance master's life story, art and scientific work. However, it turned out shortly that Merezhkovsky, whose biography was a main source for Freud's interpretation, had translated the Italian word *nibio* inaccurately, confusing *vulture* with *kite*. However, by overrating the significance of this mistranslation, we might draw erroneous conclusions about Freud's work as a whole. Ferenc Erős claims that from the viewpoint of psychological significance of fantasies, the species of the bird that visited Leonardo's cradle is ultimately insignificant (Erős, 2001). Erős underlines that in a note added in 1919 (note no. 31) Freud himself came to the conclusion that the big bird didn't necessarily have to be a vulture by all means. Nevertheless, contemporary psychobiography approaches accent that building analysis on a „single cue” (just like the vulture-fantasy) is a basic mistake in psychobiography, similar to using psychopathological arguments (which appeared in the Leonardo-essay in spite of Freud's caution) and reconstructing childhood events without sufficient data (Schultz, 2005b).

Another problematic element, as Meyer Schapiro (1956) pointed out, is the fact that Freud was probably not right, when he attributed psychological importance to the composition of *The virgin and child with St Anne*. According to Freud, this unusual layout (Virgin Mary is nursing the child Jesus sitting on the lap of St Anne) reflects on a life-story fact and a psychological situation, namely that Leonardo had two mothers. For some years he was raised by his biological mother, and subsequently his father's wife became his second mother. Schapiro thinks that this kind of artistic representation in Leonardo's age was not as extraordinary as Freud supposed, hence questioning the validity of this psychological explanation. Schuster (2005) stresses that it's a general rule in the psychology of art not to draw far going psychological conclusions from works of art without a comprehensive knowledge about the conventions of imagery in a specific era.

In addition to the above, there are some very strong critiques that refer to Freud's excessive identification with the artist, so his interpretation can be considered a continuation of the self-analysis that led to the birth of his *Interpretation of dreams* in the end of 19th century. Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer was one of the first who implied this (Wittkower & Wittkower, 2006). Alan C. Elms (1994, 2005), -one of the leading authors in contemporary psychobiography, thinks that in the background of this phenomenon we can discover Freud's ambivalence towards his own mother, who fixed her own son with her enthusiastic and erotized love and robbed his masculinity just like Freud supposed was the case of Leonardo's mother in his interpretation. Elms' other concept contains some more daring hypotheses. From the biographies it's well-known that Freud's wife, Martha became pregnant easily, but as a consequence, serious medical complications emerged (not to speak about the existential difficulties associated with the increasing number of children). The contraceptive methods in those days were primitive and drastic, so the Freud couple – in lack of better solutions – decided to suspend sexual intercourse. In the first decade of the 20th century Sigmund Freud lived a kind of ascetic way of life, as McLaren (2002) also noted. On the contrary, some say that there is some evidence of a liaison between Freud and his sister in law, Minna Bernays (Rudnytsky, 2011). Elms believes that these rumors (probably coming from Jung) are in contrast with the fact that at that time Freud really became sexually abstinent. He also thinks that Freud's urge to finish and publish the Leonardo-essay as soon as possible can be associated with the emergence of his homosexual libido's (see his friendships with Fliess, Jung and Ferenczi in Lohmann, 2008). According to Elms the Leonardo case was a serious chance for him to sublimate these feelings intellectually. For this process, the in-depth analysis of the Renaissance master seemed to be ideal, because according to Freud, Leonardo da Vinci struggled with similar conflicts. Elms claims that the phrase Freud used in a letter that was written to Jung in 1910 to describe his reviving instinctual strives after the years of abstinence – “Indian summer of my eroticism” – referred to this, and not to ongoing sexual activity (Elms, 1994. p. 46).

From another point of view, identification doesn't seem that problematic for psychological analyses. In human sciences, that are based on hermeneutic approach, there is no “objectivity” (Steele, 1979; Diltthey, 1989) and in order to do his/her job well, the psychobiographer has to “develop an empathic relationship with his subject, a relationship, which aids him in listening” (Anderson, 1981, p. 474). In identifying with Leonardo, Harold Blum (2001) sees a chance for constructing the self, which also made it possible for Freud to expand the application of the psychoanalytic method. In the Leonardo-essay, the creator of psychoanalysis deployed almost every element of his ambitious conception of infantile psychosexual development. Besides instinct theory considerations (as sublimation of

oral fantasies and Oedipal curiosity), his analysis also contains ideas that enabled the widening of the repertoire of psychoanalytic approaches. Blum thinks that the lack of theoretical and methodological background at that time underlines the significance of Freud's revolutionary ideas and dampens the consequences of the naive mistakes he presumably made. In addition to inventing psychobiography, even art historians confess that the paper is a cornerstone in their field of research. Freud's writing was the first serious effort to understand artistic creativity psychoanalytically, and the effort remained a model for subsequent work. Moreover, in *Leonardo* he introduced some psychoanalytic themes and concepts that later became extremely important in the development of psychoanalytic theory. These were the interpretation of the psychogenesis of one type of male homosexuality, the idea of narcissism, and the recognition, in the pre-Oedipal phase, that the mother-child relationship has an immense influence on shaping a man's fate. According to Freud, in Mona Lisa's smile Leonardo succeeded in portraying the simultaneous existence of the ominous threat and the promise of limitless delicacy that both belong deeply to femininity (Freud, 1957). Freud thought that Leonardo's duality was coming from the imago of the mother, and that it was projected to the model of the painting. The ambivalent representation of the mother later became a basic conception in developmental ego psychology (Edith Jacobson) and in Melanie Klein's object relations theory (Fonagy & Target, 2002; Mitchell & Black, 1996).

An interesting question of priority might lead to an alternative to Elms' interpretation of Freud's urge to finish and publish his work. In his writing about homosexuality, Freud refers to the inquiries of his contemporary, Isidor Sadger, in a footnote (No. 43). Sadger was an important figure in the history of early psychoanalysis. By the analysis of homosexual patients he emphasized the early influence of the mother in the formation of this disposition, and he was the first analyst, who ever used Paul Nacke's phrase „narcissism“. But what is the most important for us: Sadger also played an important role in the development of psychobiography. In the year of the birth of the *Leonardo*-essay (1910), he published a psychoanalytic biography about Heinrich von Kleist, and even two years before, in 1908, he wrote one about Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (Mijolla, 2005). One can easily imagine that Freud, who was very sensitive about priority in psychoanalysis, with the urgent publishing of his *Leonardo* work intended to ensure his primacy not only in the field of psychodynamic concepts (homosexuality and narcissism) but also as a psychobiographer.

The prosperity and decline of classic psychobiography

Following Freud's pioneering explorations, psychoanalysts began to use psychobiography widely to investigate the personalities of artists. From 1912 to 1937 Otto Rank Hanns Sachs edited *Imago*, a periodical dedicated to the application of psychoanalysis to human sciences such as anthropology, literature, philosophy, theology and linguistics. The writings published in *Imago* that dealt with arts were about (1) examining the relationship of the artist and the neurotic, (2) providing evince about the connections between biography and the peculiarities of a particular artist and (3) legitimizing pathography and psychobiography as a research method (Schönau, 1998). Representatives of early psychoanalysis wrote several psychobiographies, as among them the aforementioned Isidor Sadger, Ernest Jones (about Shakespeare), M. Graaf (about Wagner), Karl Abraham (about Amenhotep the 4th) and P. Smith (about Luther). In the 1910's some reviews about this developing method such as Dooloey's *Psychoanalytic study of genius* in 1916 were also published (Runyan, 2005a).

The rise of psychobiography elicited the opposition of art lovers, because the authors handled existing literature like "some museum that is easy to access, using its exhibited objects to justify new hypotheses" (Schönau, 1998, p. 32). These hypotheses were mostly of a psychopathological nature. In the personality and creativity concepts of classic psychoanalysis, psychopathological viewpoints were fairly dominant; consequently, in the first half of the 20th century, pathographical aspects formed an essential part of psychobiographical analyses. One of the best-known works of this kind is Princess Marie Bonaparte's monumental, 700 pages long book on Edgar Allen Poe, in which the author draws conclusions about the American poet-writer concerning his supposed necrophilia. "Edgar Allan Poe was a psychopath and not a pervert. Although the psychic traumata he experienced in infancy induced necrophilia in him, it was a necrophilia that was partly repressed and partly sublimated. This fact provides a key to his psychoneurosis, character, life and work" - wrote Bonaparte in 1933 (quoted by Warner, 1991, p. 454). It's very interesting that, in addition to the abovementioned opposition between artists and art-lovers, some of them – for example surrealists – accepted the psychoanalytic approach as a relevant method to explore the dynamics of creative processes. At the same year that Princess Bonaparte published her book, Hungarian poet Géza Szilágyi, "the Hungarian Baudelaire", who was analyzed by Sándor Ferenczi and was personally very close to the members of the "Budapest School of Psychoanalysis", (Bókay, Lénárd & Erős, 2008) wrote a paper about late romantic Hungarian poet János Vajda, which can be regarded as a psychobiography (Szilágyi, 1993). Szilágyi drew a parallel between the neurotic love life of Vajda and the characteristics of his

poetry, and he interpreted this with the presumption of the poet's unsolved Oedipal conflicts. These approaches were criticized strongly not only because of being overloaded with psychopathological concepts, but also because of unreliable data management and dogmatic interpretations. American analysts Edmund Bergler in the middle of the 20th century became notorious for this approach, and significant literature critics like Lionel Trilling (1950) or Malcolm Cowley (1955) referred to his works to provide deterrence. In his analyses Bergler defined creative writing as a neurosis based on oral fixation and psychic masochism, similar to alcoholism and homosexuality, which he believed to be correlated with writing talent (Bergler, 1947).

In the 1950's some significant endeavors appeared, even within psychoanalysis, which tried to clarify the opportunities and scientific status of psychobiography. In 1952 Ernst Kris in his classic *Psychoanalytic explorations in art* (2000), devoted a chapter to the question of psychobiography (*The image of the artist*). He writes that, from the age of Renaissance, biographers had generally referred to the childhood of artists when they tried to demonstrate the special and outstanding nature of their personality. By the biographies of Giotto and Dante, Kris demonstrates how this formula became popular and widespread, and adds that the readers' susceptibility to accept this is connected with unconscious fantasies like Freudian "family romance" or Rank's "myth of the birth of the hero". Related to this "our general readiness to overvalue the children's accomplishments and to regard them as extraordinary and singular, an attitude obviously connected with the search for augury in the child's early behavioral manifestations. It is not difficult to deduce some determinants of this attitude. We can often find ourselves in the desire to discover those abilities and attributes in our children, which we deny to ourselves or which we are especially proud of. We are under the spell of narcissism." (Kris, 2000, p. 72) These psychological factors rephrase the legends of the talent's discovery, and also influence the way we elaborate and interpret data obtained from different sources. Kris believes that the myth of the artist was formed by the interaction of several psychological, social and historical factors, and it determined the traditions of both historical and psychological biography writing ever since.

Some years later, David Beres intended to clarify the status of psychobiography in his article *The contribution of psychoanalysis to the biography of the artist – commentary on methodology* (Beres, 1959). According to Beres, the analyst has to limit his/her interest, and beware of identifying himself/herself with the object or transpose hostile feelings on it. This kind of attitude helps analysts to avoid the misunderstandings and misinterpretations during their work. Clinical experiences can be used in the reinterpretation of life story data, but it can turn out that some of them – tough previously regarded as fact – are only myths, and the plausibility of an

interpretation doesn't prove its validity by all means. The meaningful relationship between psychological specificities of an artistic product and some supposed childhood happenings is not always obvious. Beres names Ella Sharp as an example: the English analyst speculated about Shakespeare's infancy and personality through the writer's literary works and some available data of his early life. In addition, applying psychoanalytic knowledge by non-analysts to answer some artistic questions can also be problematic. In these cases it's a typical mistake to come to over-generalizations, for example to suppose that a poem expresses Oedipal or pre-Oedipal conflicts. These statements do not add too much to our understanding of the artist, being similar to cases when someone claims that the artist suffered from neurotic or psychotic problems. The in-depth analyses by laymen remain at the level of early psychoanalytic art-theory, when analysts used the model of dream interpretation to enucleate the artist's unconscious problems from the "manifest" content of the work of art.

In spite of the constructive criticism by Kris, Beres and others who tried to call attention to the importance of methodological clarification and the necessity of diverging from the psychopathology-centered approach, in the middle of the 20th century classic psychobiography lost its popularity and a substantial part of its credibility. After World War II the landscape of personality psychology changed markedly; researchers began to focus on decontextualized dispositional constructs (e.g. field independence) and their measurement using laboratory experiments and correlational studies (McAdams, 1997). Following the triumph of the nomothetic approach in personality and creativity research from the 1950's, dynamic life-history analysis – apart from Erik H. Erikson's works (1968, 1993) – became a marginalized scientific method for some decades (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Runyan, 2005a).

The traditions of idiographic personality research in the 20th century

When in the last decades of the 20th century – due to the increasing popularity of narrative psychology – psychobiography revived, it was necessary to redefine the theoretical background and methodological base of the method. On one hand, authors had to clarify their intellectual relationship with the classic psychoanalytic approach: what was useful and what is to be corrected? On the other hand, they had to designate what kind of other theories and methods can be included in the eclectic toolbar of modern psychobiography besides psychoanalysis. The other source of theories and methods was the personological tradition. From the 1930's the psychobiographic approach was not restricted to psychoanalysis anymore: following the pioneering work of G. W. Allport and Henry Murray at Harvard, a personality research approach known as personology was formed. This trend

focused on the exploration of the individual through life stories, and though from the 1950's it was relegated to the background (just like classic psychobiography), it created a tradition in the American personality psychology that was easy to access for those who preferred holistic approaches and wanted to develop their modern version (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Runyan, 2005a). William M. Runyan (1997, 2003, 2005a) claims that psychodynamic and personological traditions together with narrative psychology form a group called „historical-interpretative psychology”, which is the third way to make scientific psychology besides the two approaches defined by Cronbach (correlational and experimental). As he writes: „Historical interpretive psychology employing narrative methods is used in clinical case studies, in psychobiography and in studying lives in particular social, cultural, and historical contexts” (Runyan, 2005a, p. 20-21) In the following, I will briefly refer to the works of some North American personality psychologists, who contributed to the development of idiographic personality research and the studying of lives in the 20th century.

(1) Gordon W. Allport was one of the leading personality researchers at Harvard University between 1930 and 1967, and he was “interested in the German method known as *Verstehen* which he translated the intuitive method” (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003, p. 186). As mentioned before, he learned *Verstehen* from Dilthey's disciple Eduard Spranger. In his encyclopedic book, *Pattern and growth in personality* (1961), he ranked psychological means into 11 groups that are suitable for explorations of personality. The third group is called “personal documents and case studies” that can be used in studying lives. These are (a) autobiographies, (b) diaries, (c) letters, (d) unstandardized, open questionnaires, (e) oral reports like interviews, and (f) certain literary products. Allport calls these first-person documents, but besides these we can use reports obtained from a third person, just as (g) case studies, (h) life stories and (i) biographies. In the middle of the century, Allport wrote an entire book on this topic called *The use of personal documents in psychological science* (1942). In the case of first-person documents Allport mentions more than a dozen possible motives that could play a significant role in the birth of the text (defence, literary needs, catharsis, etc); the analyst always has to clarify these before the work begins. It is true that psychologists sometimes do not go beyond common sense when writing a case study or analyzing a life story. But Allport (1961) believed that this does not mean that we have to question the applicability and usefulness of the method. He emphasized the fact that life story is the only dimension that uncovers individuality, and no one can deny that, when speaking of human personality, we often mean the person's life story.

(2) The 20th century American idiographic approach in personality research is almost completely interconnected with the creator of the famous *Thematic Apperception Test*, Henry A. Murray. Originally Murray was a biologist, but in the beginning of his thirties, around 1926, he had three important encounters in his life which made him one of the greatest personality psychologists of the USA. As a married man, he fell in love with Christiana Morgan, who - according to Rosenzweig - was the real inventor of TAT (Duncan, 2002a). Through Morgan he was introduced to jungian psychology, and later he met Jung in person and they remained life-long friends. Similarly to what Allport did three years earlier, Murray travelled to Europe to gain inspiration for the search of the soul. Sailing the Atlantic Ocean, he discovered Herman Melville, the writer of *Moby Dick*. Writing about him was his first psychological work, and he remained deeply involved in the topic through his entire life (Elms, 1994; Taylor, 2009). Barresi & Juckes (1997) state that "even though Murray never completed his biography of Melville, his four published studies of Melville represent perhaps the most successful attempt by a psychologist to dive into the mind of a creative literary genius" (p. 705). In 1938 in his colossal book, *Explorations in personality* (2008) Murray presented his concepts that later became famous as "personology". The methodological part of the book was written with the contribution of Murray's disciples from the Harvard Psychological Clinic: Saul Rosenzweig, the creator of *Picture Frustration Test*, Robert W. White, who developed an influential ego-psychological theory on effectance-competence motivation, and Erik (Homburger) Erikson. In the following decades Murray was the leading personality psychologist at Harvard University. Beside the above mentioned contributors, he had several creative and successful disciples and followers like David Winter and David McClelland, who continued to develop Murray's personality theory of needs, Donald MacKinnon, the first director of Berkeley University's *IPAR (Institution of Personality Assessment and Research)*, the illustrious representative of modern affect- and script-theory, Silvan Tomkins, and the major contemporary narrative personality psychologist Dan P. McAdams. In addition to psychoanalysis, personology is the most important theoretical and methodological basis of contemporary psychobiography (Runyan, 2005a).

(3) Starting from Murray's circle, Saul Rosenzweig after his years in Harvard went to Clark University in Worcester (where Freud held his American lectures in 1909), to develop his *Picture Frustration Test* between 1938 and 1943. Two years before this he wrote an important and prophetic article, *Some implicit common factors in diverse forms of psychotherapy*. In this writing – for the first time in psychotherapy's history – he emphasized that different psychotherapeutic methods can be effectively applied to the same problems, because results depend on some common factors like the personality of the therapist rather than on particular techniques (Duncan,

2002b). Rosenzweig was deeply interested in literature, creativity, history and in the possibilities of exploring personality's individual aspects. From the 1950's he intended to integrate his concepts in an approach he called "idiodynamics". The approach of idiodynamics - according to Duncan - "focuses on the dynamics of the life history by studying the blending of the biogenic and cultural milieus in the matrix of the idioverse (the individual world of events), with special emphasis on creative process" (Duncan, 2002a, p. 36). After developing idiodynamics, Rosenzweig published several psychobiographies: about Freud's journey to America, Henry and William James, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Lewis Carroll.

(4) Erik H. Erikson was trained as a psychoanalyst in Europe, but after his immigration to the States he became a member of Murray's legendary research group at Harvard, and also worked for the IPAR (Alexander, 2005). After decades of research, Erikson came to the conclusion that "the psychoanalytic method is essentially a historical method" (1977, p. 14). Following this, he started a groundbreaking experiment: he tried to capture the interaction of individual personality and historical milieu by analyzing life stories. It is highly remarkable, that more than 50 years before this, Wilhelm Dilthey wrote as the last sentences of *Ideas concerning a descriptive and analytical psychology*: "It is a tremendous task to bridge the gap between psychology that has up to now existed and the intuition of the historical world!" (Dilthey, 1977, p. 117). It took another 50 years for psychologists to discover the intellectual relationship between Dilthey and Erikson (Tonks, 2001). Erikson first presented his solutions in *Childhood and society* (1977) through a psychoanalytic interpretation of the young manhood of a historical (Adolf Hitler) and a literary (Maxim Gorkij) person. By demonstrating how to draw general historical conclusions from life stories, Erikson overstepped the usual boundaries of psychobiography. His work *Young man Luher*, that was published in 1958, is held in esteem not only by psychobiographers (Alexander, 2005), but it is also regarded as the foundation of "psychohistory" along with Norman O. Brown's *Life against death* (Botond, 1991). In his book, Erikson ventured to demonstrate how an individual life can become an important historical event. But where can we draw the line between psychobiography and eriksonian psychohistory? Psychohistory, according to Botond, is the "application of psychology (especially psychoanalysis) in the search for the past. Sometimes it lays once famous people on the couch of the imaginary analyst, sometimes it explores the historical variations of the family and childhood (...) and sometimes it tries to identify the psychological motivations behind the dynamics of the masses and social groups" (Botond, 1991, p. 12) This definition – which explicitly refers to the three investigated areas of the psychohistorical approach – regards psychobiography as a part of psychohistory. This interpretation is confirmed by Erikson himself: before he published his other significant psychobiography in 1969

(*Gandhi's truth. On the origins of militant nonviolence*), he expounded the method of his research in his article *On the nature of psychohistorical evidence. In search of Gandhi* (1968). Definitions of contemporary psychoanalysis – in contrast to Erikson's view – argue that despite some similarities there are essential differences between psychobiography and psychohistory. „Psychobiography – writes Shiner – is a major instrument of psychohistory for the study of leading historical figures. But the two are not identical since psychohistory is especially concerned with group behavior” (Shiner, 2005, p. 1388). Modern psychobiography does not refer to psychohistory at all; probably by struggling for scientific recognition the approach is trying to distance itself from this trend, which in the last decades became rather unacceptable due to some radical ideas by the school of Lloyd De Mause (Botond, 1991).

In his previously mentioned article (1968), Erikson tried to clarify the methodological principles of „psycho-historical” explorations, which can be placed at the intersection of psychoanalytic and historical inquiries. In addition to that, the researcher uses Freud's basic psychological findings (repression, ambivalence, the importance of infantile experiences) during analysis of the explored person's texts, as Erikson accented, one has to take into consideration that the author of the autobiography can induce some unconscious countertransference reactions in his reader. Erikson believed that even the best trained historian cannot defend him/herself from these emotional impacts; most of the time the writer emphasizes, ignores, loves or hates things about his/her subject under the influence of unconscious motives. From this point of view, a psychoanalyst can profit from his/her analysis training and also is able to identify these distorting motives. Therefore, the researcher has to elucidate the functions that the analyzed record might play not only in the life of the author and his/her community, but also in the reviewer's actual life, and uncover what meaning the review might gain in his/her community both currently and historically (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Things the researcher has to clarify during his work
(Erikson, 1968, pp. 702-709)

A. Functions of the Record		
	I Moment	II Sequence
1. INDIVIDUAL	in the recorder's stage of life and general condition	in the recorder's life history
2. COMMUNITY	in the state of the recorder's community	in the history of the recorder's community

B. Function of the Review		
	I Moment	II Sequence
1. INDIVIDUAL	in the stage and the conditions of the reviewer's life	in the reviewer's life history
2. COMMUNITY	in the state of the reviewer's communities	in the history of the reviewer's communities

Erikson thinks that this diagrammatic formula can be used even in the analysis itself, for example when interpreting the subject's partial or entire life we should look for a historical analogy. In these cases, we have to compare the two persons' actual and historical conditions as well as the actual and historical conditions of their environment. In this analysis model we can discover the prefiguration of contemporary "multiple case" psychobiography (Isaacson, 2005). For example in his book Erikson often draws a parallel between Luther and Freud (Erikson, 1993).

(5) One of the leading American personality psychologists of our time is Dan P. McAdams, who integrates the narrative approach with Murray's personology and Erikson's identity theory. His career began in the late 80's, when he published *Power and intimacy: identity and the life story* (1988), in which he called for the revitalization of the personological tradition, and in the same year he edited *Psychobiography and life narratives* with Richard Ochberg. McAdams thinks that dynamic narratives derived from the individual's life stories ensure the personality's goals and unity (identity). He developed an empirically tested structural model of identity/life story that can be applied well in psychobiographical analyses. In this model, life stories that form identity are determined by four components (nuclear episodes, imagoes, ideological setting, generativity script) and two second-order variables (thematic lines, narrative complexity), which mutually impact each other (McAdams, 1988; see details later). Moreover, McAdams is making efforts to integrate personality theories in a hierarchic model (McAdams & Pals, 2007), and

emphasizes that contemporary psychobiography should apply more concepts of modern personality psychology (McAdams, 2005).

(6) The rebirth of psychobiography overlapped with the renewal of American psychoanalysis as Self psychology. An important bridge between these schools is the work of author pair Robert Stolorow and George Atwood (Karterud & Island, 1999). Stolorow wrote his PhD at Harvard University and his supervisor was Murray's colleague and adherer Robert W. White, who himself played an important role in the history of psychobiography. In the 1970's Stolorow went to Rutgers University, where another outstanding Murray-disciple, Silvan Tomkins was working with his assistant George Atwood. Tomkins developed an influential affect-theory that was applied by self psychologists when they replaced the instinct-based theory of psychoanalysis with motivational viewpoints (Monsen, 1999). Tomkins' script-theory is often mentioned and used in contemporary psychobiography and life-story analysis (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; McAdams, 2005; Schultz, 2005c). Tomkins influenced the cooperation between Stolorow and Atwood. Their works intended to explore the nature of subjectivity, in which they were trying to integrate psychoanalysis with phenomenology, hermeneutics and existential philosophy. Stolorow and Atwood insisted that psychoanalysis had to break up with its positivist heritage, and had to deal with human subjectivity, the meaning of human experience and behavior (Stolorow & Atwood, 1984). During this work, they became acquainted with Kohut's calling for psychoanalysis as pure psychology (Kohut, 2009). Stolorow and Atwood synthesized Kohut's approach with their "psychoanalytic phenomenology", and created one of the strongest trend in psychoanalytic self psychology called "intersubjectivity theory" (Karterud & Island, 1999). Their book, *Faces in a cloud. Subjectivity in personality theory* (1979), in which they showed the subjective sources of significant personality theories of the 20th century, is an important reference for contemporary psychobiography (Elms, 2007; Runyan, 1997). Atwood's article written with Kyle Arnold about Nietzsche (2005) is a chapter in the *Handbook of psychobiography* (Schultz, 2005a).

The "narrative turn" and the renaissance of psychobiography

The pretension to study individual lives scientifically returned to personality psychology upon intensification of the critics in the 70's (Carlson, 1971), and following the so-called "narrative turn" in psychology that began in the 1980's (Bruner, 1986; Hargitai, 2007; László, 2008). Due to this processes, psychobiography as a method began to resurrect in the 80's through the pioneering works of James Anderson, Irving Alexander, William Runyan, Alan C. Elms, Dan McAdams and others. In the last two decades – especially in the United States – following the increasing popularity of

narrative approach, there has been a veritable renaissance of psychobiography and the efforts of studying lives (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Runyan, 2005). In 1988, the *Journal of Personality* published a thematic issue on psychobiography with the writings of McAdams, Elms, Anderson, Runyan, Irving Alexander, Rae Carlson, David Winter, Richard Ochberg and others; the issue later was published as a book as well (*Psychobiography and life narratives*). In 1994, Elms issued *Uncovering lives* (Elms, 1994), and Runyan's article, *Studying lives: psychobiography and the structure of personality psychology* was included in the American Academic Press' monumental *Handbook of personality psychology* (Runyan, 1997). After the turn of the millennium more and more journals and handbooks began to open towards psychobiography: in 2007 the prestigious The Guilford Press published *Handbook of research methods in personality psychology*, which contains a chapter by Alan C. Elms entitled *Psychobiography and case study methods* (Elms, 2007). By the middle of the decade, the first synthesis of "new" psychobiography was born: William Todd Schultz edited *Handbook of psychobiography* with the contribution of McAdams, Runyan, Elms, Alexander, Anderson, Ogilvie, Atwood and others (Schultz, 2005a).

The success of this revival helped the rebirth and reforming of the psychoanalytic tradition. In 2003, the *Annual of Psychoanalysis* published a psychobiographic special issue, the authors of which were partly identical with those of *Handbook of psychobiography* (James Anderson, Alan C. Elms, William Runyan), though the latter was not committed to psychoanalysis. Recent psychoanalytic attempts moved further away from the original Freudian instinct theory and the formalism of ego-psychology, and enriched psychobiography with concepts from object relations theories and psychoanalytic self psychology (Anderson, 2003).

The development of the modern psychobiographic approach hasn't stagnated; it still contains some further opportunities. According to Elms (2007), the most striking tendency is that the focus of analysis seems to shift from single cases to comparative explorations (see "multiple case psychobiography", Isaacson, 2005). The accumulating results of idiographic research can form a database which will help the comparative analysis of biographic categories. Elms stresses that, when utilizing this database, we shouldn't keep aloof from quantitative methods and statistical tests, because their use will not mean a return to the much criticized nomothetic approach. "We do have by now quite a few studies of creative writers,, so maybe the more quantitatively oriented among our life history researchers can begin to draw statistically meaningful conclusions across them... There is no reason to protect our methodological purity by refusing to look also at data across a number of those individual and unique writers." (Elms, 2007, p. 111).

Theoretical and methodological aspects of contemporary psychobiography

What are the advantages and novelties of contemporary psychobiography compared to its predecessor, the classic psychoanalytic approach? First of all, the authors mentioned above tried to clarify their relation to the classic approach, because its "bad reputation" and the partly justified critiques gave an opportunity to question psychobiography's mere *raison d'être*. Nevertheless, according to Schultz (2005b), the existence of bad psychographies does not tell anything about psychobiography in general and, with the knowledge of its potentials and disadvantages, it is easier to write outstanding analyses (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Characteristics of good and bad psychobiographies (Schultz, 2005b)

Good psychobiography markers	Bad psychobiography markers
Cogency Narrative structure Comprehensiveness Data convergence Sudden coherence Logical soundness Consistency Viability	Pathography Single cues Reconstruction Reductionism Poor theory choice Poor narrative structure

Runyan (1997) in the 80's and 90's has already called attention to the dangers of reductionism in psychobiography: the pitfalls that lie in the reconstructions of early childhood events or the overemphasis on infancy at the cost of later life events. He also pays particular attention to the critical evaluation of alternative explanations (Runyan, 2005b). Comparing more than a dozen, mostly psychoanalytic interpretations of Van Gogh's ear-cutting story, he asks the question: how can we decide from the available data, which explanation is standing next to the truth? His criteria are the following: (1) logical soundness, (2) comprehensiveness, i.e. taking into account several different aspects, (3) surviving the tests of attempted falsification, (4) consistency with the full range of relevant evidence, (5) supports from above, i.e. consistency with general knowledge about human psychology and with our knowledge about the particular person, and (6) its credibility is comparable to that of other interpretations.

a) Theoretical background

"Perhaps the most frequent criticism of psychobiography concerns its heavy dependence on psychoanalytic theory" – wrote Alan C. Elms (1994, p. 9) The psychoanalytic approach focuses on emotional questions that essentially determine the formation of a life story; psychobiographical analysis is not functioning without this outlook. For today's psychobiographers, a broader theoretical arsenal is available. Elms (2007) is adducing Erikson's developmental model, Murray's theory of needs and its supplements by McClelland and Winter and finally, Tomkins' script-theory. Runyan (2005a) demonstrates in a historical context how theories and methods have influenced the studying of lives in the 20th century from basic psychoanalytic concepts (Freud), through the traditions of personology (Allport, Murray, White), to contemporary narrative approaches (McAdams, Wiggins). McAdams (2005) believes that psychobiography should rely more courageously on different theories and methods of personality psychology. However, by applying these authors have to keep in mind that the functioning of personality has at least three different levels (dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, life stories). All of these can play an important role in life stories and in the understanding of the person, but their usage requires different theoretical and methodological approaches, and providing the results of one level (e.g. dispositional traits) does not mean that we have covered the other aspects as well. Elms (1994) points out that this relationship is not one sided: psychobiography and psychology can mutually do a lot for each other. Not only psychobiographic explorations have to take the more rigorous methodological expectations of personal psychology research into consideration, but personality psychology could also learn a lot from psychobiography, for example to realize that sometimes it's more useful to investigate the personally significant than the statistically significant. And finally, adds Schultz (2005b), one should also keep in mind that in personality psychology several outstanding theorists – Freud, Jung, Maslow, Piaget, Erikson, Laing, Murray, Allport and Tomkins – created their influential models by analyzing single cases or by exploring only a few people.

b) Data management methods

The first step in biographical explorations is to choose the subject, which is not a rational decision most of the time; "Let your subject choose you!" – suggests Elms (1994, p. 19). In these cases – as Erikson (1968) already pointed out – it is useful to clarify the analyst's personal motivations. In current qualitative research this is called personal reflexivity. As Carla Willig defines it, "personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected, and possibly

changed us, as people and as researchers.” (Willig, 2008, p. 10) These partly unconscious aims exist regardless of whether we take them into consideration or not, and they determine our approach. To avoid excessive subjectivity it is important that the person we choose to analyze should not be too loveable (like Mother Theresa) with the potential to cause idealization, or too deterrent (like Hitler); the best condition to start with is ambivalence towards the person of choice (Elms, 1994).

The next step is to look after available data about our subject: this is when the first-person and third-person documents come into view (biographies, confessions), as Allport (1961) defined and ranked them. The data coming from different sources have to be evaluated, selected, graded and interpreted. Irving Alexander in his article published in *Journal of Personality's* psychobiography issue (1988) and in his 1990 book on the psychobiography of Freud, Jung and Sullivan (*Personology: method and content in personality assessment and psychobiography*) presented his basically psychoanalytic oriented model, which helps to organize and to select biographic material (Alexander, 1990). Alexander (Figure 3) listed eight characteristics he calls “primary indicators of psychological saliency” that can be used in psychological analysis. These are frequency, primacy, emphasis, isolation, uniqueness, incompleteness, error, distortion and omission and finally negation. For example the only place where Leonardo spoke about his childhood in his diary belongs to “primacy”, while the lion head with open jaws as pictorial repetition on Salvador Dalí’s paintings in 1929 corresponds to “frequency” (Kóváry, 2009).

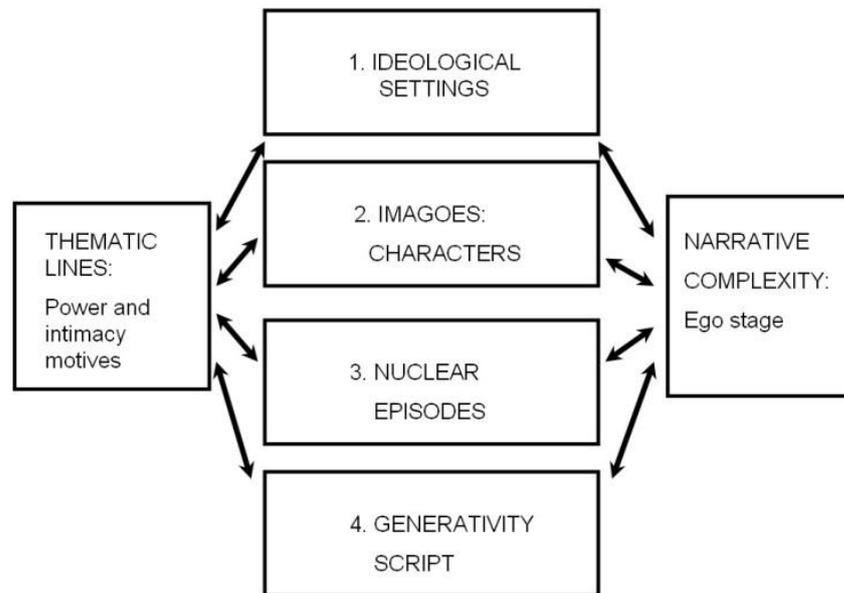
Figure 3. The models of Alexander and Schultz that help in organizing biographical material, for example to select the psychologically significant parts of an autobiography (Schultz, 2005b)

Irving Alexander: Primary indicators of psychological saliency	William Todd Schultz: Keys to identifying “prototypical scenes”
Frequency Primacy Emphasis Isolation Uniqueness Incompletion Error, distortion, omission Negation	Vividness, specificity, emotional intensity Interpenetration Developmental crisis Family conflict Thrownness (getting into a scene that places the subject into a situation which violates the status quo)

Schultz (2005b) claims that, by using the concepts of Alexander, we can identify a large amount of outstanding motives in biography. But how shall we know which one of them holds the key to understand the person's life? Those life story events and memories that possess this quality Schultz calls "prototypical scenes" and, according to his assumptions, these can be extremely important in understanding an individual's life. In these scenes numerous motives and conflicts are compressed, motives and conflicts that are very significant in the subject's life. Every prototypical scene is salient from Alexander's viewpoint, but not every salient event or memory is prototypical. (Salient for the researcher and for the subject, but for the latter it is not always clear and conscious.) Schultz names five specificities to identify scenes: emotional intensity, interpenetration, developmental crisis, family conflict and thrownness (Figure 3). By this it is assumed that the 24-year old Salvador Dalí's encounter with his future wife Gala in 1929 was a prototypical scene because it had serious emotional, familiar and artistic consequences and it is related to the emergence of lion heads on his paintings in the same year (Kóváry, 2009).

The "identity as life story" concept of Dan P. McAdams (1988), who is coming from the direction of narrative psychology was presented in the reinterpretation of Erikson's *Young man Luther*. The model contains four components: nuclear episodes of life stories, the characters of the story called imagoes, the ideological background and a script of generativity. Each component is determined by two second-order variables: thematic lines and narrative complexity (Figure 4). In our analysis, we can reveal the specificities of these components in a particular life story and we can also evince how second order variables influence the components and vice versa. The identification of these connections could be very useful in organizing and interpreting biographical data. In the case of thematic lines – depending on the subject – the motives of power and intimacy can be replaced by other motives defined by Murray and his followers (see for example Smith, 1992). Narrative complexity is determined by the maturity of the ego that can be identified with the help of Jane Loevinger's model (Loevinger, 1997). Considering the connections of the variables we can set hypotheses about the protagonist of the life story that can be evaluated both with text analysis and empirical methods, depending on whether the protagonists are alive or have already deceased (McAdams, 1988).

Figure 4. Identity as life story and its components – the model of Dan P. McAdams (McAdams, 1988, p. 61)



Naturally, in this phase we can use other models to organize our material, especially if we are interested in aspects of personality that are beyond the dimensions mentioned above by McAdams (2005). Based on the modern psychoanalytic approach, during the organization and interpretation of biographical data one can apply Winnicott's conception of false/real self conception and his theory of transitional phenomena; it is also possible to outline the principles and the level of managing subjective experience of the self and the objects by using ideas from Kernberg. Employing the theories of Kohut one can describe the consequences of the interactions between self and mirroring self-objects (Anderson, 2003). In my multiple case psychobiography of Hungarian writers and cousins Géza Csáth and Dezső Kosztolányi (Kőváry, 2009), I applied the categories of Lipót Szondi from his theory of the "family unconscious" (1996) to organize the biographic material.

c) Interpretive models

After collecting the data from first- and third-person documents defined by Allport and organizing, selecting and evaluating them according to the above mentioned models, the psychobiographer can begin to elaborate his or her interpretations. According to Elms (1994, 2007) the process of a psychobiographic study does not follow any predetermined standards. The form of the analysis always depends on the explored person, on the investigator, on the place of the publication, on the planned length of the article and some other variables. Shorter psychobiographies may be organized according to the regular APA standard (literature review, hypothesis, data, discussion, conclusion) but even in these cases it is not likely that

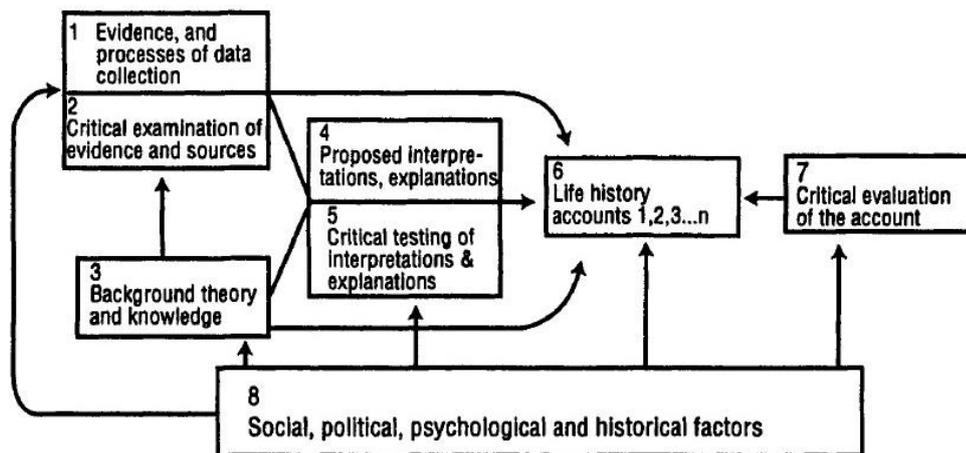
the study would strictly follow the progression of the typical psychological investigation.

In Elms' description (2007), the process begins with (1) the choice of the subject, followed by (2) the formulation of tentative hypotheses. Elms says that if we are lucky, in this phase a "genuine mystery" emerges from the life story that can't be explained with the usual attributional schemes (for example: are there any psychological factors that might explain why on every painting Dalí made in 1929 there is a lion's head with open jaws?). After that we can start the (3) initial data collection from varied sources: this usually begins with accessible biographies about the chosen person (third-person documents), then it extends on autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters and creative products (first-person documents). Since the third-person documents are full of interpretations and can be distorted by the prejudices of the author, it can be useful to read them in parallel and critically. Psychobiographers often stop collecting data after some time, because too many narratives can be confusing. But what is the point of stopping? Rae Carlson, who was one of the pioneers of modern psychobiographic research in the 1970's and 1980's reclined on the most reliable biography of the investigated person (Elms, 2007). After data evaluation (4) we can revise the tentative hypotheses, depending on the applied theoretical framework (psychoanalysis, personology, narrative theories). Next (5) we can perform a more focused data collection. At this time, it can be useful to apply Alexander's concept of "primary indicators of psychological saliency" or Schultz's method to identify prototypical scenes in the life story. The data collected from different sources could contain several contradictions. To handle these (6) Elms suggests adopting some methods used by historians: whenever it is possible we have to lean on primal sources, but if it is necessary to employ secondary ones, the researcher has to clarify the author's attitudes towards the protagonist (see Erikson, 1968). We have to keep in mind that in the genre of psychobiography, the research process is iterative. "Instead of cumulating every possible bit of data in one big pile then pulling conclusions out of that pile, a conscientious psychobiographer will engage a more or less continuous process of examining preliminary data" – says Elms (2007, p. 103). So we have to apply further operations in iterative analysis (7). On the basis of preliminary data we formulated tentative hypotheses, then we were looking for justifying or refuting data to narrow or shift the focus of the hypothesis. Now we can look for further evidence (independent from the data that were the basis of tentative hypotheses): this will justify, refute, narrow or modify our assumptions again. The method of this iterative analysis fully resembles the hermeneutical circle that is well-known in European philosophy for ages (Dilthey, 1996; Gadamer, 2004). Finally, we (8) can identify and delimit valid conclusions; they will be probably followed by (9) further iterative studies of the

subject done by other researchers. Time, readers and further testing will tell which one will be considered more insightful.

A few years before Elms' description, William M. Runyan (1997) developed a process model for the progress of analysis and interpretation (Figure 5). Runyan thinks that particular phases do not follow each other in fixed order in this process: the numbers are only for denoting the sequences.

Figure 5. A model of the component process of studying lives (Runyan, 1997, p. 52.)



A special form of life story analysis is "multiple case" psychobiography, denoting the parallel processing of more cases, the significance of which is increasing (Elms, 2007). In psychobiographies containing the exploration of more than one person, one can find the characteristic starting points of this approach (Isaacson, 2005): (1) We can aim at unfolding the personality psychological background of a product created by two or more individuals; (2) We can try to shed light on both sides of a relationship; (3) We might compare two persons who have something significant in common (e.g. both of them are writers); (4) We might want to study a political, historical, social or cultural movement; (5) We can use comparative psychobiography for theory building or testing. Multiple case psychobiography has two subtypes: (a) in one of them there is a direct/indirect connection between the explored persons or, alternatively, we can apply (b) categorical pairing or a single dimension comparison. Sometimes these categories are overlapping. In my above mentioned paper I was investigated the psychological background of some works of two Hungarian writers, Géza Csáth and Dezső Kosztolányi (Kőváry, 2009). The analyzed novels and short stories, "Anyagyilkosság" ("Matricide") by Csáth and "Édes Anna" ("Sweet Anne") by Kosztolányi were about murdering the real (Csáth) and the symbolic (Kosztolányi) bad mother. Csáth and Kosztolányi were cousins and they grew up together (Isaacson's starting point no. 2). Both became writers (starting

point no. 3), though Csáth was a doctor as well. There was a direct relationship between them (subtype *a*), but there are also several common motives in their lives and works (dealing with literature, interested in psychoanalysis, using morphine, writing about matricide – subtype *b*). The similarities and differences between these motives illuminate individual psychological specificities of the subphases in the case of the creative process. In my analysis I focused on four intersections between their lives and work, which all can be regarded as choices determined by their personality and the unconscious (not only the Freudian personal subconscious but the family unconscious observed by Szondi). These intersections were the choice of occupation, the choice of ideals, the “choice” of sickness and the choice of love object. These are similar to Szondi’s categories that describe the dynamics of family unconscious. There are conspicuous similarities in their choices (as partly mentioned above): Kosztolányi and Csáth both became writers, they both thought that psychoanalysis was a kind of intellectual revolution, they used morphine, but what is more important that there are significant differences between the outcomes of the choices. All the differences show that Csáth was a more impulsive personality and couldn’t keep up some boundaries. He became morphine addict and died at the age of 32, and there are overgrown psychoanalytic concepts in his late short stories (while Kosztolányi gave up morphine by himself and in his writings – while influenced – kept a healthy distant from psychoanalysis).

It’s very interesting and salient that they both wrote their version of matricide. (The fantasy of matricide is connected to individualization and creativity, see Julia Kristeva’s *Melanie Klein: Matricide as pain and creativity*, 2001). The elaborations of the matricide fantasy are different: Kosztolányi’s version is more symbolic and decent, while the short story of Csáth is very direct and explicit. It is also notable, that following his psychological disintegration caused by addiction (associated with the loss of his poetical language) Csáth, who couldn’t find a symbolic way out of his more and more abnormal impulses, committed a kind of real matricide by murdering his wife.

Psychobiography as a method: its limits and its usefulness

Psychobiography can be regarded as a method of idiographic approach in personality psychology. Classic Freudian psychobiography was about analyzing and understanding the dynamic and developmental determinants of artistic creativity. But the correlations and connections that were revealed by Freud’s research illuminated not only some important aspects of the creative process, they led to

significant insights into the functioning of the human mind and personality in general (Blum, 2001).

Psychobiography is akin to some qualitative methods such as case studies and text analysis, and its results have to be assessed within the context of the hermeneutic tradition (Szokolszky, 2004). It is different however from text analysis because in psychobiographical analyses the author of the text (for example in autobiography) is not seen as a function of the text (as in discourse analysis) but rather as a real phenomenon, who can be explored and interpreted psychologically (Schultz, 2005b). On the other hand case studies are usually focusing on clinical aspects, and modern psychobiography tends to avoid pathography. In addition, in clinical case studies several facts have to be withheld because of ethical and juristic reasons which limit the exploration of the "connectedness of the world of human spirit" or the "life-nexus" (Dilthey, 2002, p. 213 and 218) that is necessary for understanding the psychological aspects of the subject's life history. Findings about the subject's personality can be embarrassing, and publishing these can cause trouble in the subject's professional and private life. In psychobiography, which usually deals with departed people, there are no such limits, and working with entirely public data about an identified subject makes it easier to evaluate the results of the research. Nevertheless, the number of available tools is limited. Psychoanalytic psychobiography for example must do without two essential tools of dynamic psychology: free associations and the analysis of transference. Some critics hence suggested that it was much more rewarding to start from the psychoanalysis of living artists than to apply an uncertain form of psychobiography (Kraft, 1998). There are two problems with this suggestion: to begin with creative artists tend to avoid in-depth analyses of their personality because they have a fear of losing their capabilities (Schuster, 2005). The other factor is connected with time and distance. Schultz (2005c) stated in his chapter on the psychobiography of artists: nothing alive can be calculated, and this position is similar to the approach of Hans Georg Gadamer, who says that temporal distance has a great significance in hermeneutical interpretation and understanding. He wrote: "Everyone is familiar with the curious impotence of our judgement where temporal distance has not given us sure criteria." (Gadamer, 2006, p. 334).

That the application of psychobiography in personality psychology is inevitable on the other hand is connected with the specificities of personality psychology as a discipline. McAdams (2005; McAdams & Pals, 2007) emphasizes, as mentioned also above, that the three levels of personality research (dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations and integrative life narratives) have different questions to answer and use different methods, and results of one level do not mean that they cover other

dimensions as well. The first level is trying to capture individual differences by using correlational methods, the second is focused on motivations, aims and needs; laboratory experiments can help a lot to improve this approach. The third, holistic dimension studies identity as it is constructed by life story narratives, and it can only rely on case studies (Figure 5). Taylor (2009) argues that McAdams' model should be supplemented with two other levels: the unconscious, that is explored through dialogue in the situation of transference-countertransference, and subjective experiences inquired with the help of introspection.

Figure 6. The three levels in personality research (McAdams & Pals, 2007, p. 5)

Three Traditional Emphases in Personality Theory and Research			
Emphasis	Questions	Traditional concepts	Method preferred
Individual differences	How are persons different from each other? What is the <i>structure</i> of human individuality?	Temperament, traits, types	Correlational studies
Motivation	Why do persons do what they do? What do persons want? What energizes and directs the person's behavior? What are the <i>dynamics</i> of human action?	Instincts, needs, values, goals, conflicts, complexes, defenses, self-actualizing tendencies	Laboratory experiments
Holism	How do we understand the whole person? What does a person's life mean? What integrates a life?	Ego, self, proprium, style of life, unity thema, identity, life structure	Case studies

William M. Runyan (1997, 2003) believes that the study of lives is based on historical-interpretative methods, which are the third way to do scientific research in personality psychology besides experimental and quantitative (correlational) approaches. But Runyan goes further as he claims that, since the last decades, there has been a tendency for integration in human sciences just as in the case of personality psychology. It is easy to see that this synthesis usually concerns the theories and methods of "hard" traditions in personality psychology (behavior research, cognitive psychology, psychometric and biological approaches). Runyan thinks that it would be very useful to find a similar synthesis for the approaches in personality research that belong to the "soft" end like psychoanalysis, phenomenological-humanistic psychology, cultural psychology or narrative perspectives. (I would add that some psychoanalytic authors like John Gedo, Mark Solms or Peter Fonagy would argue that psychoanalysis doesn't belong to the "soft end", as they regard it as natural science based on biology, see Fónagy & Target, 2002; Gedo, 1999). Studying lives could play a significant role in creating this soft synthesis and, beside the abovementioned, this synthesis would also encompass case studies and all the theoretical aspirations and quantitative-empirical

researches that belong here. Runyan stresses that the formation of a “soft synthesis” and “historicizing of psychology” is timely, because the “hard synthesis” and its integration with biology (cognitive neuroscience) foreshadows a scientific hegemony within psychology that could affect the decline of studying other important dimensions, such as personality and life stories, subjective experiences, texts and their meaning, and cultural-historical influences.

Finally, I would like to stress that research practice using psychobiography could also serve the training of psychologists. In their education there is often a great emphasis on theoretical training and on the learning of quantitative research and assessment methods. However, developing practical competencies of the professional helper is a much harder question, though after graduating most of the psychologists will perform practical work. Psychology students therefore need comprehensive, deep and personal knowledge of psychological functioning (including the functioning of their own self) that can be applied in practice. What factors make psychological consultations or psychotherapies successful? Reviewing the outcomes of relevant investigations Duncan (2002b) claims that the client's personality adds up to 40%, technique and placebo effects (beliefs, expectations) 15-15%, and the qualities of the relationship 30%. In this respect, university education can contribute to the future success of psychology students if it focuses on the development of the student's personality (self-awareness) and their empathic skills.

An extremely hard question of socializing for this profession is how we can support the students' professional personality development and self awareness appropriately within academic institutions, since forming self-knowledge groups out of student groups can cause problems. Students also have to acquire a knowledge of human functioning that is beyond “common sense” and that is useful in practical work, but until their master practices they do not have enough opportunities to deal with clients on a longer term basis, and in a supervises manner. In my opinion, this knowledge can only be created by in-depth, integrative personal work that is not based on statistic evaluation of correlated personality traits, but on the understanding of individual lives by case studies and exploration of life stories. It is not accidental that the traditions of training students in personality psychology established by Henry A. Murray at Harvard contained the idiographic, in-depth, semester-long inquiry of one chosen individual (Karterud & Island, 1999; Runyan, 2005a).

Teaching and applying modern psychobiographic approaches could become part of the theoretical and practical education of psychology students, and could play a significant role in socializing for the profession of psychology. A century-long

experience reveals that studying lives can be extremely useful and contribute to the development of the recognition of the self and the other, and its practical applications such as psychobiography are able to prepare future professionals to better understand the meaning of individual lives supported by indispensable self-reflection; just as Dilthey wrote: "Understanding is the rediscovery of the I in the Thou" (1996, p. 192).

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