

Bucholtz Mirosława. *Henry James i sztuka auto/biografii* [Henry James and the Art of Auto/Biography]. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2011.

If it is true that we live in the age of auto/biography, as some contemporary critics claim (Everett 6-10), then it appears that there is no better exponent of a present intellectual and cultural turn towards life-writing genres than the great Henry James. In the last decade of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first century, one witnessed an unprecedented convergence of attention on the Master who became the subject of three major biographies (by F. Kaplan, L. Gordon and S.M. Novick), dozens of critical studies (by E. Haralson and W. Graham, among others), as well as at least five novels (including C. Tóibín's *The Master* and D. Lodge's *Author, Author*), one novella (C. Ozick's *Dictation*), and two short-stories ("The Master at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, 1914-1916" by J.C. Oates and "Silence" by C. Tóibín). A revival of interest in James as the man of flesh and blood (and—one needs to acknowledge the fact—the meanders of Henry James's flesh have been found particularly irresistible to biographers and novelists of all provenances) has been accompanied by a renaissance of enthusiasm for James's literary legacy—not only in the English-speaking countries, where his position among both critics and readers has long been assured, but in other parts of the world as well. Suffice it to say that in 2011 one saw the publication of first (*sic!*) translations of *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* into Polish, the latter being listed among the best books published last year by the editors of, for example, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Książki* quarterly (Kurkiewicz, "15 najlepszych" 62).

Undoubtedly, such a proliferation of Henry James's "versionings" should stimulate researchers' interest and encourage their scholarly pursuits in the field—especially those who have devoted a significant part of their academic career to the study of the Master's life and work. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that Mirosława Buchholtz, Poland's most eminent James scholar and a professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, has turned her attention to Henry James as both a subject and an object of various auto/biographical endeavours, which inhabit the ever-intersecting realms of fiction and non-fiction. Her findings are now available to the Polish readership in the form of a study entitled *Henry James i sztuka auto/biografii*. The book, which can well be read as a companion to the many lives of Henry James that have emerged over the past decades, addresses two interdependent and intertwined phenomena, namely Henry James's life and work. And, one needs to admit, it approaches the issue with a profound knowledge of (and love for) its subject.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Mirosława Buchholtz's book—brimming with precision, intellectual discipline, compendiousness, and stylistic brilliance—is nothing

short of a success. It deserves to be hailed as an essential read that any student or consumer of James's works should be encouraged to consult—indisputably, hers is the best academic work on James ever to have been published in Poland. However, *Henry James i sztuka auto/biografii* also stands out as a breakthrough study and an invaluable contribution to contemporary literary studies in Poland. Regardless of their language orientation, Polish academics have not held auto/biographical writing in high esteem and often locate (if at all) life-writing at the margins of both literary and critical activities. Mirosława Buchholtz makes a strong case for life-writing and for its centrality in contemporary critical discourse, and, in my opinion, succeeds like no one has before her. One should be grateful to the scholar and her publishers for making such an important study of present perspectives on auto/biographical writing available to the Polish audience (academics but general readership as well, due to the lucidity of Buchholtz's argument).

*Henry James i sztuka auto/biografii* consists of four chapters followed by extremely helpful annexes which, for example, provide one with a comprehensive list of Polish translations of James's novels and short-stories. Chapter One entitled "Studia auto/biograficzne" [Autob/biographical studies] discusses the phenomenon of life-writing. Mirosława Buchholtz's research is detailed, meticulous and, frankly, impeccable. She does not limit her inquiry to simple recapitulation of the most important concepts and theoretical models which have been operating in the field of life-writing (from S.T. Coleridge and L. Strachey, via P. Lejeune and J. Lacan, to J. Watson, S. Smith and G.T. Couser). She also presents Polish contribution to the debate on subjectivity and its representation (the studies on "autofiction" by R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska and J. Lis, as well as the volume on biography edited by R. Kasperowicz and E. Wolicka)—a commendable act as the contribution in question is relatively humble and not easily accessible (unlike English or French sources). A proof of Mirosława Buchholtz's profound understanding of her subject is manifested in her insistence on the use of one slashed word, i.e. auto/biography. She abandons an awkward term prevailing in the Polish academia, i.e. "literatura dokumentu osobistego" [literature of personal document] in favour of "auto/biography," and rightly so, since her proposition does not only reflect a tension between biography and autobiography, but it also emphasises the dialectic and genre-bending characteristics of any instance of life-narrative, generally considered a borderline and threshold phenomenon. One should note that Buchholtz refuses to outline past and present debates concerned with the reality of life-writing only. On the contrary, whenever possible, she provides her readers with extended commentary as well as her own observations and interpretations—most laudable, perhaps, in the formulation of "p/akt biograficzny" [biographical p/act] and "u/mowa biograficzna" (the latter inspired

by her reading of Lacan and considering “mowa” [speech] to be inhabiting the realm of the Other [*l’Autre*]).

The following three chapters offer an essential read to anyone interested in both the work and life of Henry James. Chapter Two, tellingly entitled “Wszyscy biografowie Jamesa” [All of James’s biographers], offers an account of *all* (literally) kinds of biographical endeavors that have been concerned with Henry James and his life. Mirosława Buchholtz’s research is, once again, all-embracing and exhaustive, as she does not limit her inquiry to the investigation of biographies only, but, in line with the dominant life-writing paradigms, she welcomes and reports on different versions of Henry James as constructed by, for example, his contemporaries (through reminiscences of family and friends), literary and cultural critics, editors of his letters, notebooks, and, finally, novelists that, in recent years, have shown such enthusiasm for portraying the Master in their biographical novels, novellas and short-stories. Buchholtz never simply recounts their claims or speculations, but each time responds to them with a discerning judgement and vast knowledge (manifested, for example, in her reading of limitations of Novick’s two-volume biography of James). Buchholtz’s search for Henry James (and her truly dialogical model of that search) continues in Chapters Three and Four. The former discusses the Master through the prism of his attempts at both biography and autobiography (James’s biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne and William Wetmore Story as well as three volumes of his autobiography, among others). She focuses, in particular, on the questions of self-projection (biographical act as an attempt at autobiography), self-invention and incompatibility of James’s auto/biographical acts with facts that one is expected to “sign,” e.g. with the subjects’ relatives or readers.

However, Mirosława Buchholtz’s truly masterly command of her subject reaches its peak in the last chapter of her study which, in a thoroughly original manner, offers a close scrutiny of visual representations of James. Once again, one cannot but admire the comprehensiveness of Mirosława Buchholtz’s enterprise, as she analyses an impressive number of photographs, paintings, engravings, sculptures and cartoons showing Henry James or, to put it more accurately, Henry Jameses. Most importantly, she never misses the central aspect of her study, namely the ambivalence between the subject and object of knowledge. Diverse forms of art and visual representations of the Master are, again, consistently seen as a joint effort of the photographer and his or her model; hence, providing a perfect illustration of the major concern addressed by life-narrative.

John Carlos Rowe concluded his introduction to *The Other Henry James* with hailing multiple Henry Jameses in the following way: