

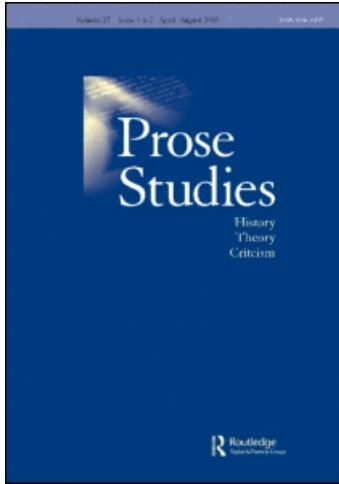
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Jaume Aurell

BENEDETTO CROCE AND ROBIN COLLINGWOOD

Historiographic and humanistic approaches to the self and the world

Autobiographies by intellectuals are a privileged source of intellectual history. This potentiality is increased when we study historians' autobiographies, where they negotiate with a past which is actually their own past. Acknowledging the genre's potential as a source of theory and history, this essay examines Benedetto Croce and Robin Collingwood's memoirs, connecting them to the general trends of historiographic evolution in the twentieth century. Their exploration of the self becomes not only an excellent testimony of the methodological and epistemological trends of between-wars historiography, but also illustrates the natural alliance between history, philosophy, and literature at that time. The analysis focuses on the organic connection between their autobiography and their scholarly work and on how their autobiographies dialogue with the critical framework on scholarship of their time, giving us insight into processes of intellectual history.

Keywords Robin G. Collingwood; Benedetto Croce; historiography; autobiography; intellectual history; humanism

Autobiographies by intellectuals are a privileged source of intellectual history, if we consider the theoretical possibilities that emerge from self-reflection on personal experience and academic itinerary. Acknowledging the genre's potential as a source of theory and history, I will read two between-wars historians' autobiographies, connecting them to the general trends of historiographical evolution in the twentieth century. I analyze historians' autobiographies considering them not only as literary artifacts where historians engage the stories of their lives but, more specifically, as sources of intellectual history and markers of developments in historiography.

Taking E. H. Carr's aphorism – "before you study the history, study the historian" – as my point of departure, I argue that disciplinary training, positions, and ideology do influence scholarly choices and that academic autobiographies are a privileged site of these multiple discourses. The philosophical positions of the two historians chosen for this article – Benedetto Croce and Robin Collingwood – give their life writing projects remarkable theoretical potential. Their exploration of the self becomes not only an excellent testimony of the methodological and epistemological trends of between-wars historiography, but also illustrates the fluid alliance between history, philosophy, and literature at that time. This disciplinary collaboration was rejected by postwar

structuralist and materialistic historians, who abandoned philosophy and literature in order to forge strategic relationships with social sciences (particularly geography, economics, and sociology) rather than with the humanities.

Apart from my interest in their disciplinary evolution, I start from the assumption that Croce and Collingwood's autobiographies are intellectual artifacts, articulated in a particular time and circumstances. Thus, I aim to examine the specific characteristics of these historians' autobiographies, categorizing them into divisions that help explain how the time wherein these historians worked shaped their personal accounts and how, in turn, they influenced their intellectual, academic, and cultural contexts. Specifically, my analysis of these autobiographies focuses on two mutually enhancing issues: on the one hand, I will discuss the organic connection between their autobiography and their scholarly work and, on the other, I will highlight how their autobiographies dialogue with the critical framework of scholarship of their time, giving us insight into the processes of intellectual history.

Although a small number of them acknowledge it explicitly, historians have always recognized the influence of their life experiences in their engagement with history, beginning from the choice of subject matter to the forms in which they write, and methodologies they use. If we understand history as both the events of the past and the narration of those events, the social and intellectual role of historians – as the accepted authorities of existing versions of the past – cannot be underestimated. They may not have necessarily participated in the events they write about (although many have, especially when they write autobiography), but they certainly mediate our access to that history, though their scholarly work.

Jeremy D. Popkin's groundbreaking study, *History, Historians, and Autobiography* (2005) offers a systematic analysis of an extensive corpus of historians' autobiographies and reads the theoretical connections between life writing and history by using these accounts as sources for historical understanding. He unravels the connections between history and autobiography as a way of reconstructing the past, approaching life writing texts as a source for the knowledge of the historians' experiences and professional positions. As Rocío G. Davis notes in the introduction to our co-edited issue on academic autobiography and historical discourse, this perspective, which foregrounds autobiographies as a framework for knowing the ways in which authors function professionally, can be taken a step further (3 – 4).¹ I argue that these same autobiographical texts are also academic artifacts that allow us to negotiate in more depth historiographical and intellectual tendencies of the twentieth century. As a consequence, I propose to expand Popkin's questions and ask, connecting to Davis' ideas: can we claim that, even as they write *as historians*, these academics function *autobiographically* (consciously or not)? Can historians' scholarly work and autobiographies be perceived as *performative* acts (that is: they produce what they mean), rather than as exercises in objectivity? How do the historian's autobiographies reflect and actively influence historiographical trends?

Recent developments in cultural studies suggest that cultural products – such as history books – are highly performative – they *construct* as they *recount*. I argue that an organic reading of historians' autobiographies are enriched by a consideration of their scholarship, and vice versa. I posit that historians write their autobiographies in a manner, and with a methodology, that is similar to the way they wrote their historical texts. Taking these aspects into account, I classify these historical-autobiographical

texts based on their intention, form, the narrative identity they promote, and the genre they choose. I ascribe an explicative intention and descriptive form to the writing between the wars, as well an humanistic approach to their own lives, that will contrast with the justificative intention and analytical form to the postwar period, and a performative intention with poetic form to the historians who wrote after the seventies. I have discussed postwar and postmodern historians elsewhere, and will focus here on two of the most influential between-wars historians: Benedetto Croce (1866 – 1952) and Robin G. Collingwood (1889 – 1943).²

Croce and Collingwood wrote their autobiographies in 1915 and 1939, respectively, just at the beginning and the end of those turbulent times. I want to read these autobiographies in context, to illustrate how Croce and Collingwood's processes of self-representation reflect the intellectual concerns and cultural forms of the period between the wars. This allows me to analyze specific forms of self-inscription that naturally reflects the issues prevalent in historical research and writing at the time, as well as the manners in which historical texts developed. Since the historians' autobiographical turn of the 1980s, we have many more number of postwar and postmodern than between-wars historians' autobiographies. By the time autobiography's legitimacy as a historical practice became acceptable, many of the between-wars historians had passed away or were not interested in working on their memoirs. This may explain, in part, the shortage of between-wars historians' autobiographical accounts. Yet, these few accounts are an excellent confirmation of the humanistic dimension of between-wars historians, and there are probably enough examples to trace the principal general coordinates of these historians' generation.

Perhaps the most compelling cases are Croce and Collingwood's self-narrations, classics of academic autobiography, in which a scholar deals simultaneously with the academic, public and, only as a consequence of the two, personal matters. Croce and Collingwood's autobiographies also have to be read within the specific field of historians' autobiographies, a tradition that began with Giambattista Vico's precocious self-narration (1731), and was driven a step further by Edward Gibbon's *Memoirs of My Life* (1796) and Henry Adams' *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907). Popkin points out the contrast between Gibbon's and Adams' texts in these terms:

Gibbon created a powerful model for the depiction of a life devoted to intellectual pursuits. Although his *Memoirs* were celebrated by the romantics and the often classified with those of his great literary contemporaries Rousseau and Goethe, Gibbon's story was not that of a man of imagination. Instead, he dramatized the value of a life dedicated to hard, disciplined work. In revolt against Gibbon, Adams invented a kind of antiheroic autobiography that emphasized the disjuncture between individual comprehension and the movement of history; he also showed that personal narrative could be used to challenge the notion of the autonomous self exemplified in autobiographical texts like Gibbon's (282).

Nevertheless, Croce and Collingwood's autobiographical styles are not strictly based on Gibbon's sober self-narration of his life, his work as a historian, and his biographical project, nor connected to Adams' brilliant literary exposition of his own life and times, but, rather, on Vico's intellectual and theoretical auto-essay. As Vico did two centuries before, Croce and Collingwood take advantage of the auto-exploration of the human

experience – a story of their own – in order to better understand the processes and general laws that govern historical evolution – *the* history. They *used* their autobiography as an opportunity to push history forward and connect it with a philosophy of history. If Vico is considered the founder of the philosophy of history, Croce and Collingwood belong to the canon of the most distinguished philosophers of history in the twentieth century.³ Thus, if Vico's autobiography, *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo*, is the projection of the *Scienza nuova* onto his own life, Croce and Collingwood's autobiographies also contain within themselves their own philosophical perspective of history.

As we know from his Diary, Croce began writing his autobiography on the fifth of April 1915 and finished only three days later, on the eighth of the same month (notes from Croce's "Diary in Galasso" 111). It would be difficult to believe that such a profoundly intellectual text could be produced in such a short time, if we did not know the speed and concentration that characterized Croce's historical production. He returned to the text a month later, to correct and revise its form, completing this task in seven days (from May 25 to 31). Yet the speed of composition does not imply a lack of depth in the final text, written in the language of the classics. The opening resounds with references to Dante: "Having now reached my fiftieth year, I have determined to employ the ideal pause in my spiritual life" (19). Just as Dante embarked on the *Commedia* using the image of losing himself in a wild forest in middle of his life, his compatriot Croce started writing his autobiography in the middle of his career. Croce notes that he wants to consider the teachings of the past, but also to prepare himself for the future: "looking back at the road I have traversed, and trying to fix my eyes on that which I have still to traverse in the years of work that lie before me" (19).

Interestingly, he describes the genre of autobiography in a negative rather than in a positive way: what he writes are neither confessions, nor recollections, nor memoirs. He does not want to submit to moral self-examination because, he explains, it easily leads to vanity – either the vanity of complacent self-approbation or the vanity of self-accusation and lamentation. Nor is he going to set down his recollections, because "though the past fills me with emotion and with melancholy, I should not think myself justified in putting these feelings on paper unless I regarded myself as a poet" (21). And, finally, he is not going to write his memoirs, because:

... memoirs are the chronicle of one's life ... But the chronicle of my life, so far as it contains anything worth recording, is contained in the chronology and bibliography of my written works; and since I have taken no part, either as actor or as witness, in events of another kind, I have little or nothing to say of the men I have known or the things I have seen (22).

Rather than present what might seem a vain confession, melancholic recollection, or simple chronicle of his life, he aspires to sketch a criticism, and therefore a history, of himself. In one of this diaries, in an entry dated April 5, 1915, Croce writes that he has "just started this afternoon to sketch a kind of intellectual autobiography with the title *Contributo alla critica di me stesso* – contribution to the criticism of myself" (notes from Croce's "Diary in Galasso" 111). He describes his text as "intellectual autobiography," defining the kind of life writing project he engages in. His text, thus, is really an exercise in self-criticism rather than a simple registry of his life's more significant

events: it is “the history of my *calling* or *mission*” (23), the mission of an humanist, in the classic sense of the word.

As a philosopher of history, Croce is well aware of the weight of the present in his own retrospective interpretation – what others have called “presentism.” Since he examines and critiques his past in the light of the present, he knows he risks the loss of objectivity, but he believes his autobiographical enterprise will be worth the effort, so that other historians may speak of him with better knowledge and more truth, and eventually with more enlightened judgment. Future critics will be able to engage the facts of his life “which they might have missed or only discovered with difficulty, just as I for my part no doubt miss others which they can easily detect” (24). In the end, Croce is persuaded by Goethe’s statement, chosen as the epigraph for his autobiography: “Why does not the historian do with him/herself that of he does with the others.” More specifically, he asks, why can the historian not write *the* history of him or herself?

Following Goethe’s inspiration, Croce approaches his life critically, not only describing but also evaluating his intellectual activity and considering his works in their relation to himself and his spiritual and moral values (49). He looks back to his childhood to discern there the first premonitions of his later development. As an historicist-historian who energetically argued that there is no history that is not contemporary history, he analyzes his own past as “contemporary history,” that is, looking for the signs of the past that are “present” in the present. In this search, he unearths the seed of his interest for the humanities in “the eagerness with which I asked for, and listened to, every kind of story; the pleasure that I took in the first books of fiction and history that were given to me or fell into my hands; and the love that I felt for books in themselves, in their material presence” (26). His multidisciplinary formation – history, literature, philosophy – grew from the teachings of a mother who never lost her love of books, mostly romances of medieval life, and her love for the art and monuments of antiquity.

If his intellectual sphere was promoted by a learned mother, Croce’s commitment to public life and politics was nourished by a father always shut in his study among his business papers and a grandfather who was a staunch old-fashioned magistrate, devoted to the Bourbons. When he was nine, Croce entered a catholic school, where he received a moral and religious education free from superstition and fanaticism. The priests who governed the school were patronized by the aristocrats of the Bourbon party, and were close to the Neo-Guelfism doctrines. Nevertheless, in the balance between scholarship and political interest, more weight was clearly given to the former. Croce’s commitment to the public emerged only in his maturity, and was marked with a critical attitude towards all legends inspired by political interests, a suspicion toward the illusion of Liberalism, and abhorrence of rhetorical ostentation.

His spiritual convictions and religious crises interest him also as signs of the evolution of his personality and habits in scholarship. One of his childhood memoirs is particularly illustrative: as a boy, he expended laborious weekly efforts to remember his sins in order to confess them and began taking notes of his sins on pieces of paper. Looking back, he connects his habit of systematic and rigorous research as a scholar with this childhood effort. He suffered a religious crisis in adolescence, which caused him much grief and apprehension. This period of internal turbulence concluded with a giving up of his religious beliefs, though he retained a strong sense of the moral value of human actions.

A family tragedy shook him in the middle of his internal crisis. He lost his parents and his only sister in an earthquake in Casamicciola in 1883, when he was 17. After the quake, he lay injured for some hours, buried beneath the ruins, listening to his father's dying cries (Popkin 68). Knowing this essential event of his life allows us to understand how and why Croce's autobiography focuses on the narrative of his intellectual itinerary rather than on his life experiences. This latter is only recounted and specified in order to contextualize the former. After the quake, he moved to Rome, where he struggled to recover, or even define, normalcy. The years after the tragedy were the darkest and most bitter of his life:

Stunned by the domestic tragedy that had overtaken me, ailing in body and, though suffering from no one definite disease, appearing to suffer from all at once, perplexed as to myself and the path I ought to take, racked by doubts concerning the purpose and meaning of life and similar problems to youth, I lost all lightness of heart and faith in the future, and was tempted to think myself faded before I had flowered, old before I had been young . . . I often ardently wished that I might not awake in the morning, and even formed thoughts of suicide (39 – 40).

Yet Croce, the intellectual, emerged little by little from this deep depression. He began to pursue research into self-chosen subjects without system or rigor, inventing his own methods and approaches. He found himself challenging materialistic theories because he saw clearly that they were merely negations of morality and veiled egoism. His *Philosophy of Practice* was a book in which, though published many years later, all these thoughts of his youth found expression, giving that text, to his eyes: "almost the appearance of an autobiography, though this is wholly concealed from the reader by the systematic form of its exposition" (43).

These experiences shaped the authentic between-wars humanist that Croce was: a pluridisciplinary intellectual whose works are difficult to categorize into one specific field. They are, simultaneously, history, literature, philosophy, and art history. His approach is that of a "man of letters" searching for harmony with life and goodness of heart. In the end, his misfortunes and adversities drove him to discover his intellectual calling, which he lived to the fullest when he returned to his beloved Naples in 1886. His short but difficult "exile" in Rome (1883 – 1886) functioned as a catalyst to his personal commitment with the public through his multifaceted philosophical and historical task. Croce's dramatic testimony of a youth's internal and emotional struggle is the striking story of the shaping of an humanist who gave up the bitterness and passion of Roman political circles and "entered a society of librarians, keepers of archives, scholars, antiquaries, and such-like good, worthy, gentle souls, old or middle-aged men for the most part, not much given to thinking" (45).

As a part of his training, he traveled to Germany, Spain, France, and England. His eyes look at these lands "always as a scholar and man of letters" (46). He reduced his social duties and, if they were necessary, he performed them with very little enthusiasm. He took care of the administration of the family affairs left by his father, but only to preserve rather than to increase them. He saw the political life of his country as a mere "spectacle" which he watched with no intention of taking active part in. He took certain interest in what was then called the "social problem," but even that

he regarded only as a problem of abstract ethics. In opposition to these activities, he wrote numerous articles on Neapolitan history and art.

Yet after this “erudite” phase, in which he collected an enormous amount of anecdotes, data, and antiquarian details, he felt called to more abstract and philosophical thinking rather than to the positivistic task of mere data collection. In a clearly Burckhardian reminiscence, and in a typical between-wars historiographical gesture, he argued for a moral rather than political history: “This I planned to treat not as political history, but – to quote once more my words of the time – as moral history, understood not as a chronicle of events but as the history of the feelings and spiritual life of Italy from the Renaissance onwards” (51). These forms of historiographical preoccupations – committed to increasing the thematic and theoretical scope of his investigations – led him, almost unconsciously, to the problem of the nature of history and of knowledge.

Thus, Croce, the philosopher, emerged naturally from his earlier position as Croce, the intellectual historian. At this point, crucially, Vico’s *Scienza nuova* – a classical work in theory of history, written two centuries earlier – entered his life. As a fruit of this revelation, his books on aesthetics, theory of art, and method of literary criticism were written in the 1890s. Croce was also briefly attracted to Marxism during these years, but finally he rejected it because of its reductionism and materialism. This was perhaps his last intellectual crisis, because the turn of the new century “marked the beginning of a new period in my life, the period of maturity of harmony between myself and reality” (70). A very productive period of his life started with the new century. Interestingly, he explains that the level and quantity of his work in his period represents “my escape from the difficulties of the earlier years, the solution of my internal conflicts, my achieving of peace” (76). He concludes this emotional description with a remark loaded with meaning regarding life-writing: “a peace which, so far as it is peace, has in it little to relate” (76). To be sure, peace-periods are fertile land for mono-graphical and bio-graphical production, while tragedies, arguably, work better for auto-biographies.

The last part of Croce’s text focuses on the practice of “literary criticism in my school essays” (78). He advocates intellectual engagements centered on the universal rather than on the particular, appealing to the imaginative rather than the rational: “art is not a work of reflection and logic, nor yet a product of skill, but pure and spontaneous imaginative form” (79). According to his master, De Sanctis, he argues that erudition without philosophy is neither criticism nor history but mere formless matter. Erudition without philosophy is mere antiquarianism – a concept opposed to “presentism,” which is precisely the central point of Croce’s (and Collingwood’s) philosophy of history. Indeed, the search of the universal in history is patrimony of the generation of between-wars philosophers of history – Croce, Collingwood, Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, Ernst Troeltsch, José Ortega y Gasset, Herbert Spencer – who reacted against positivism and offered an alternative to the social-economical orientation of the hegemonic historiography of the *Annales* after the 1930s.⁴

Connected to his affirmation that all history is contemporary history, Croce argues that history is seen mainly through the eyes of the present and in relation to its problems. As a consequence, historians do not conceive of the past as a distant object to be admired (*antiquarianism*) but as an adjacent reality that shapes and continues to influence one’s personal and collective life (*presentism*). Presentism certainly offers the

danger of undermining the integrity of the “pastness of the past” – merging the past and the present – but preserves the historian from an excessive emotional and empathetic distance from the past, that would in the end dehumanize history. Very graphic metaphors, used as the titles of two brilliant books on the theory of history, illustrate the impulse to preserve history from an excessive presentism. John Gaddis entitles his book *The Landscape of History* (2002), suggesting that we need to acknowledge the perspectives with which we access the past, and David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985) reminds us that the past is no longer here, but somewhere else. Nevertheless, they also argue that historians can approach the past through the different ideas and behavior of people in the past, seeking alternatives for a present they find objectionable. What these present-minded historians must avoid is doing violence to what ought to be the historian’s central concern – the authenticity of the past – and commits what Marc Bloch called “the most unpardonable of sins” for a historian – anachronism (173).

Gordon S. Wood explains, in connection to American historiography:

... it is natural for historians to want to relate the past to the needs and problems of the present. Indeed, historical explanation is only possible because we today have different perspectives from those of the historical participants we are writing about. Most new historical investigations begin with an attempt to understand the historical circumstances that lie behind a present-day problem or situation. It is not surprising that our best recent work on the origins and nature of slavery coincided with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Or that our recent rich investigations into the history of women grew out of the women’s movement of the past three or four decades. This is as it should be: the problems and issues of the present should be the stimulus for our forays into the past. It is natural for us to want to discover the sources, the origins, of our present circumstances (8 – 10).

These words could have been inscribed by Croce, whose tendency to presentism preserved him from empty erudition or schematic materialism: “I distinguish, for instance, scholarship from philological history and philosophical history from poetic history, and all these from history in the strict and proper sense of the word, historical history. Again and again, as I laid bare the weaknesses of ‘eruditism’ or ‘philologism’” (83). This proclivity to the universal:

... not only saved me from associationism and positivism and evolutionism, but equally put me on my guard against falling into the errors of a half-naturalistic and half-mystical Hegelianism ... This Platonic or scholastic or Herbartian conception not only protected me against the prevailing naturalism and materialism of my youth and armed me for the future, but it also rendered me absolutely proof against the wiles of sensationalism and decadentism (85).

Positioned at the turn of the century and in the years between the wars, that period of vertiginous changes in philosophical, artistic, historiographical, and literary structures, Croce designed his own theoretical path, by preserving himself from Marxism, materialism, positivism, naturalism, decadentism, and evolutionism: in one word,

from all of the intellectual trends that tend to reduce historical and human experience to scientific and materialist paradigms.

Croce, in the end, is aware that presentism creates new pasts. Descartes, for example, exists as a specific seventeenth-century intellectual, but also as a representation (and re-creation) of the following age. As he explains, “Descartes did not produce rationalism and the French Revolution; it was the spirit of the world that actualized itself successively in Cartesianism, Encyclopaedism, and the Revolution” (112). This conception of time and history is crucial not only to understanding the past, but also to comprehending the constant re-actualization of the past in the present. Yet paradoxically, what Croce is most proud of in his own autobiography is that it has allowed him to “liquidate his past” (115), to acquire for himself the necessary peace of mind that will allow him to pursue and intensify his work as a philosopher of history. The historian who defended the idea of the natural rupture of the boundaries between past and present becomes the historian who seeks to preserve himself from an excessive presence of his past in his present. Croce’s autobiography illustrates how life writing texts might provide us with the hidden intellectual agendas of the scholars precisely because of their *realism* as a literary and historical genre.

The English version of Croce’s autobiography was published by Oxford University Press in 1927. The Press’ academic reputation left no doubts as to the significance of this autobiography. Yet, more interesting from the point of view of intellectual history, is the fact that the translator was another renowned philosopher of history at that time: Robin G. Collingwood, one of the most influential historians of the twentieth century. Collingwood was to go on to write his own autobiography, which was also published by Oxford University Press, only 12 years after Croce’s. The similarities between Croce and Collingwood’s autobiographies are clear: from the choice of a generic title (*An Autobiography*), to a similarity in length, parallelisms in content, and even a comparable front cover.

Collingwood produced one of the most interesting and archetypal autobiographies of the historians of this generation, written in a elegant, sober and academic literary style. The academic appearance of the “contents,” whose titles seem to presage a strictly academic memoir, reveals a life story wherein academic issues, politics, and personal life are deeply allied. He explains that his autobiography elucidates the development of his ideas because “the autobiography of a man whose business is thinking should be the story of his thought” (“Preface”).

The protagonist of Collingwood’s autobiography, himself, embodies the figure of a “renaissance humanist,” as in other between-wars historians’ texts. They consider themselves specifically historians, but seem to feel the responsibility of performing as humanists whose range of intellectual curiosity encompasses the entire range of the world’s knowledge. Collingwood’s training best proves this. As a child, he learned Latin and Greek, and he began to read “everything” he could find about the natural sciences, especially geology, astronomy, and physics. His father gave the children lessons in ancient and modern history, and he found himself enjoying what would be his future field of specialization: the history of thought. His parents were professional painters, and, experiencing their work processes, he understood that no work of art is ever finished: “work ceases upon the picture or manuscript, not because it is finished, but because sending-in day is at hand, or because the printer is clamorous for copy, or because ‘I am sick of working at this thing’ or ‘I can’t see what more I can do to it’” (2).

His training at Oxford completed his classical and humanistic formation, and provided him with perspicacity in the resolution of intellectual matters as demonstrated in his influential book *The Idea of History* (1946). His philosophical and archaeological formation – two disciplines in the antipodes of the methodology, speculative the former, inductive the last – completed his preparation as a real humanist, capable of negotiating with different humanistic and social disciplines. As he explains in his autobiography, Collingwood intersperses profound theoretical comments in his text, taking advantage of the vicissitudes of his academic formation: “my work in archaeology impressed upon me the importance of the ‘questioning activity’ in knowledge: and this made it impossible for me to rest contented with the intuitionist theory of knowledge favoured by the ‘realists’” (30). Though he questions the appropriateness of introducing such commentaries in an autobiography (“for it is an autobiography, not a work on logic”), he immediately picks up the thread of his narrative and extensively develops his thoughts on the debate between realist and idealist logicians, who were very active at that time.

Just after rendering these thoughts on logic, Collingwood presents himself as a citizen more than as an academic. He tries to explain the physical and moral devastation of the Great War, and – more importantly for him, who writes “as one who during the latter part of the war was employed in preparations for the peace conference” – “a war of unprecedented ferocity closed in a peace-settlement of unprecedented folly, in which statesmanship, even purely selfish statesmanship, was overwhelmed by the meanest and most idiotic passions” (89). In a gesture characteristic of the fin-de-siècle and between-wars historians, and with an attitude similar to Croce’s, Collingwood unveils a profound sense of identification between the intellectual historian and the citizen concerned about the future of his world. He soon comes back to the point of his academic work, and lucidly explores – perhaps even in a way more understandable than in his strictly academic writing – his ideas on the history of thought and his efforts to combine theory and practice. But he abruptly changes the subject again and devotes the last pages of his book to the menace of Fascism. The focus, though it shifts repeatedly, clearly manifests his central intellectual concerns. Notably, in this play of shifting subjects, only the private is expressively missing.

The last sentences of the Collingwood’s autobiography articulate the way historians of his time conceived autobiography:

It is not the business of this autobiography to ask how completely the country has in fact been deceived, or how long the present degree of deception will last. I am not writing an account of recent political events in England: I am writing a description of the way in which those events impinged upon myself and broke up my pose of a detached professional thinker. I know now that the minute philosophers of my youth, for all their profession of a purely scientific detachment from practical affairs, were the propagandists of a coming Fascism. I know that Fascism means the end of clear thinking and the triumph of irrationalism. I know that all my life I have been engaged unawares in a political struggle, fighting against these things in the dark. Henceforth I shall fight in the daylight (167).

Collingwood manifests the same sensibility and preoccupation for the troubles of his time as Croce, who also concluded his text with a statement on the Great War, does:

“But as I write these lines, the war rages around me, and may well involve Italy; and I cannot see what tasks will be forced upon me or what duties assigned to me, event in the near future, by this gigantic war, whose course and remoter effects are still obscure, this war which may issue in world-wide disturbance or in sheer exhaustion” (116). Great scholars, such as Croce and Collingwood, did not live in Ivory Towers, and expressed their concerns with the human problems that beset their times. Indeed, both conclude their autobiographies speaking about the most important challenges of their respective time – the First World War and Fascism. These men were great historians, but also distinguished citizens, who sought to actively change their world rather than only observe it. Interestingly, Collingwood also uses the word “humanist,” archetypal of this historian’s generation, to define himself.

Reading Croce and Collingwood’s autobiographical accounts illustrate why between-wars historians approach to research is so naturally interdisciplinary. Their training was pluridisciplinary, combining only in the fields of human and social sciences but also among human, social, and experimental disciplines. This global knowledge is evidenced in their autobiographies, where the discussion of their historiographical training and research blends with the practice of other disciplines (art history, literary criticism, archaeology, history, philosophy). This differentiates them from postwar historians, whose autobiographies focus primarily on historical and historiographical matters, and who reveal a strong sense of belonging to the collective of “professional historians,” an intellectual trend interestingly connected with the consolidation of the professionalization of history (Boer, XIII-XV). Croce and Collingwood consider themselves a part of the entire academic community, and in this sense are “humanists” and “scholars” rather than strictly “historians.”

Croce and Collingwood had to deal, in one way or another, with the historical drama of their time. The experience of these dramatic events, and the consideration of their works of historians as a humanistic vocation rather than as simply a profession, give their autobiographies a peculiar air, where the academic and public sphere are the principal subject of their accounts. Used both as a historical or historiographical sources, the theoretical potentiality of these autobiographies are proportional to the reputation of their authors, who were eminent historians, humanists, and citizens at the same time.

One question remains, nevertheless, open in the analysis of these autobiographies. They do not provide us any detail concerning their family, their private lives, their intimate feelings. Croce gives us the details of his parents’ and sister’s death in the earthquake in Casamicciola in 1883, but only to use this as the turning point that led to a crucial step forward in his intellectual itinerary – his move from Naples to Rome – rather than to express his grief or engage the personal trauma of loss. Collingwood provides information about his parents in order to explain his interdisciplinary intellectual training rather than to introduce details of his family life, character, or other personal details of his childhood.

This rhetorical option connects to the proposal I made in the introduction to this paper: historians articulate their autobiographies in the same way they conceive the writing of history. As a consequence, the rhetorical choices, the narrative intentions, and the thematic preferences of their autobiographies are conditioned by their historiographical orientation – and vice-versa. Since between-wars historians are ascribed to an explicative intention, humanistic approach, and descriptive style rather

than the justificative intention and analytical form to the postwar period, and a performative intention with poetic form to the historians who wrote after the seventies, Croce and Collingwood do not consider the incorporation of personal detail significant for their autobiographies. Their approach to the self, and the consequent approach to the world, transcend the particular in an attempt to engage life's more general realities and truths.

This autobiographical structure gives Croce and Collingwood's narratives a broad perspective and interest that makes them literary artifacts that are, in some senses, atemporal, timeless, that is, in their use of the eternal language of the classics. Though this does not, at first glance, seem to be a good attribute for an historian – who is always supposedly working within the coordinates of time and place – this move allows them to revise traditional understandings of the form, suggesting that the life of the mind is as powerful and attractive a topic as the experiences of life. By foregrounding the intellectual processes central to their scholarship, Croce and Collingwood rearticulate the genre of autobiography, emphasizing a more porous boundary between forms of scholarly writing and the writing of life.

Notes

1. Davis' introduction makes suggestive proposals for ways of thinking about the connections between life writing and the discourses of history. See the special issue of *Rethinking History* (13.1, March 2009) for further discussions on the discursive possibilities of historians' life writing.
2. See my "Autobiographical Texts as Historiographical Sources: Rereading Fernand Braudel and Annie Kriegel," "Autobiography as Unconventional History: Constructing the Author," and "Performative Academic Careers: Gabrielle Spiegel and Natalie Davis."
3. See Dray for a discussion of Croce and Collingwood's place as philosophers of history.
4. See Leonard Krieger, Otto Oexle, and my *La escritura de la memoria* for a discussion of these points.

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