Gabriele Griffin, ed. *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian Writing*. London: Routledge, 2002.

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1 It is an open secret that the biographical guide or dictionary is the most intertextual genre of all academic writing - and the least acknowledged to be so. Looking up individual entries in several dictionaries (possibly in the course of researching for a 'new' biographical abstract oneself?), one encounters very often one and the same portrait of a writer. Editing and compiling a biographical guide neither seems to be a very original task nor do existing articles on individual authors, unlike book-length biographies or studies, seem to enjoy something like a copyright - they are common academic knowledge. Of course there is only so much one can present within a limited space and most of this space is taken up by the presentation of unchanging factual knowledge such as birth dates, education, publications, maybe suggestions for secondary reading. However, a foray into several lexica and dictionaries should ideally be rewarded by a more differentiated portrait of the person one is in quest of, not just slightly differing versions of the same.

2 Gabriele Griffin's *Who is Who in Gay and Lesbian Writing* both measures up to this ideal and fails it. While she assembles for the first time a fascinating host of contemporary gay and lesbian writers from the Anglophone world and beyond, the entries on writers from the centre of the gay and lesbian canon are prefigured by the choices of other dictionaries - an encounter with the usual suspects is unavoidable, and their inclusion in this dictionary often seems to have occurred by associative names-dropping rather than by conceptual criteria. On the other hand, this of course testifies to the fact that there is by now a canon of gay and lesbian writing that produces its own faultlines in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Here I have to lay open my own highly intertextual approach to Griffin's book and my hallmark of comparison, as well: it is Claude J. Summer's *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* (ed., 1995). Picked at random, some entries in Griffin's - e.g. on Charlotte Mew, James Merrill, John Cheever - prove to be taken almost verbatim from his companion. In the face of this 'intertextual' practice, as questionable as it is widely-practiced, Griffin's dictionary has its greatest strength where it is most original: in its astonishing range of entries on very contemporary gay and lesbian novelists, poets, playwrights, theorists of and fighters for the existence and beauty of same-sex desire.

3 Laying open its (academically/politically correct) criteria, the introduction to the *Who's Who* professes an awareness of the historical alterity of the literary treatment of same-

sex love as well as the contemporary plurality of meanings of what gay and lesbian love means or might look like. This awareness is one result of the GLQ studies of the last three decades which have developed reading strategies that make same-sex desire visible, have done meticulous research on historically specific representations of sexuality that provide us with a differentiated vocabulary to speak about same-sex desire and offer a sophisticated theoretical approach that allows us to understand the differences and the complex relationships between sex, gender and sexuality. (Accordingly, there are also entries on some major GLQ theorists such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Marjorie Garber, and, opening the historical dimension, on Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld and K. H. Ulrichs.) These issues inform Griffin's choice of authors and crystallize in two main criteria defining "gay and lesbian writing:" "texts with a lesbian and/or gay content" and "texts written by writers who identify publicly as lesbian and gay, or who are known to be lesbian and gay" (ix). The first category opens up a spectrum of gay and lesbian content ranging from "expressing admiration for the body of someone of the same sex" over "playing with gender on a linguistic level" (also known as the Jeanette-Winterson-technique) on to the "extended description of a same-sex sexual encounter" (ix), and therefore can potentially include almost all of the traditional (read: heterosexual) canon. While the two categories often overlap, Griffin makes explicitly clear that "there is no necessary correlation between the (sexual) identity of the writer and that of her/his characters" (x). Thus, gay or lesbian authors are included whose work does not explicitly treat homosexual issues, which on the other hand can be traced in the work of heterosexual writes. Another kind of "cross-gendered" focus, one might add, is the existence of quite a few number of women writers writing gay men, such as Mary Renault, Claudia McWilliam or Patricia Nell Warren.

4 Far from establishing a separate and separatist gay and lesbian canon (as the title might indicate) Griffin thus aims at imploding the notion of a "high-brow" canon itself by juxtaposing homosexual and heterosexual writers, ancient and very contemporary ones, texts from "high" and popular culture (xi). Of course this new canon produces its own exclusions as well: Since "high cultural" writing is much better documented and object of academic debate, this information is more accessible, a fact which is reflected in the length of some entries from the centre of the gay and lesbian canon. On the other hand, there are writers who have not yet been re- or dis-covered for gay and lesbian writing. The enormous proliferation of lesbian and gay publishing since the 1970, at least in the Anglophone world, makes exclusions necessary and is made to account for the clear predominance of writers from Britain and the US (300 out of some 440 entries), while in other countries the literary

treatment of same-sex love is still subjected to censure and the texts very difficult to obtain.

5 The major achievement of this compilation certainly is to have detected and included so many contemporary writers from those countries. Especially the entries on contemporary lesbian writers from Scandinavian countries (e.g. Bente Clod, Helvi Juvonen, Mirkka Elina Rekola, Pirkko Helena Saisio, Cora [Fabricius] Sandel) and on gay writers from Middle and South American countries are noteworthy here. However, since these writers are fairly unknown except to the specialist, an index grouping certain writers under headings that denote both the genre of their work and national/ethnic origin would have been very welcome and made the dictionary a much more useful research tool than it already is. This is also true for the impressive range of contemporary lesbian playwrights from Britain or the US, often of mixed ethnic origin, which as the editor's own special field of research clearly is the forte of the dictionary. The majority of these writers are here assembled for the first time (including, for example, Claire Dowie, Tash Fairbanks, Bernardine Evaristo, Pam Gems, Bryony Lavery, Nina Rapi, "Split Britches"); an index could have pointed out the prominence and variety of this genre in lesbian writing at a glance.

6 What makes the *Who's Who* interesting for all already working in the field of GLQ studies, or looking for an introduction to it, is precisely that it offers informative, well researched articles on gay and lesbian writing of the twentieth century, and especially on contemporary writers. While establishing a tradition of gay and lesbian writing undoubtedly is one very important project of the GLQ studies, it would have been a more fortunate decision to restrict the *Who's Who* to the twentieth century (whilst, of course, marking this restriction in the title). It is simply not feasible to chart the history of gay and lesbian writing *and* provide first-rate material on contemporary writers on a mere 224 pages. The attempt to bring both aspects together ("from Sappho to modern pulp fiction," blurb) leads to the choice-by-names-dropping as well as unaccountable exclusions mentioned before. Besides, it is not necessary: Much excellent research has been done and published on the gay and lesbian literary heritage, as represented for example by the companion edited by Claude Summers, which remains unsurpassed when it comes to embedding single authors, texts or genres in their historical context. Given the emphasis on twentieth-century writing, some entries (important as these authors are) simply remain at odds with the majority of articles. An especially crude example of this is Virgil, who is quoted as the only antique author on male-male desire, while Homer, Plato, Martial, Ovid and Theocritus (to name but a few) are simply ignored. While some relevant early modern authors such as Marlowe, Shakespeare, Rochester and Richard Barnfield are duly quoted, the dictionary, due to ist concept, cannot provide the

context needed to understand their works in their historical alterity. Ihara Saikaku, a seventeenth-century Japanese poet, famous and important as his writings are for contemporary gay poets, remains oddly unconnected with the other entries on Japanese writers; these entries fail to give an impression of both th literary tradition and the culturally specific context they are embedded in. Of course, a bibliographical guide is simply not able to provide all this information; yet this makes it all the more desireable to refrain from presenting knowledge on a universal range (a master narrative) and to tell localized, contextualized, contingent stories instead.

7 Again, it is undoubtedly very important to establish a gay and lesbian literary tradition, or rather: to implode the heterosexual canon by showing that same-sex desire often is at the very centre of it. However, the *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian Writing* and, indeed, its readers would in my opinion have profited from restricting the entries to the twentieth century. As it is, this biographical guide serves as a very helpful, easily accessible introduction to much of the huge corpus of gay and lesbian writing existing in our consciousness by now. The many entries on contemporary writers from countries beyond the Anglophone world, France and Germany make it a necessary research tool and above all a valuable complement to the historically more profound, yet not as recent *Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*. Its slender format - as compared to the 786 pages Summers companion weighing over 2 pounds - will make it the first choice of students wishing to enter the vast field of GLQ studies.