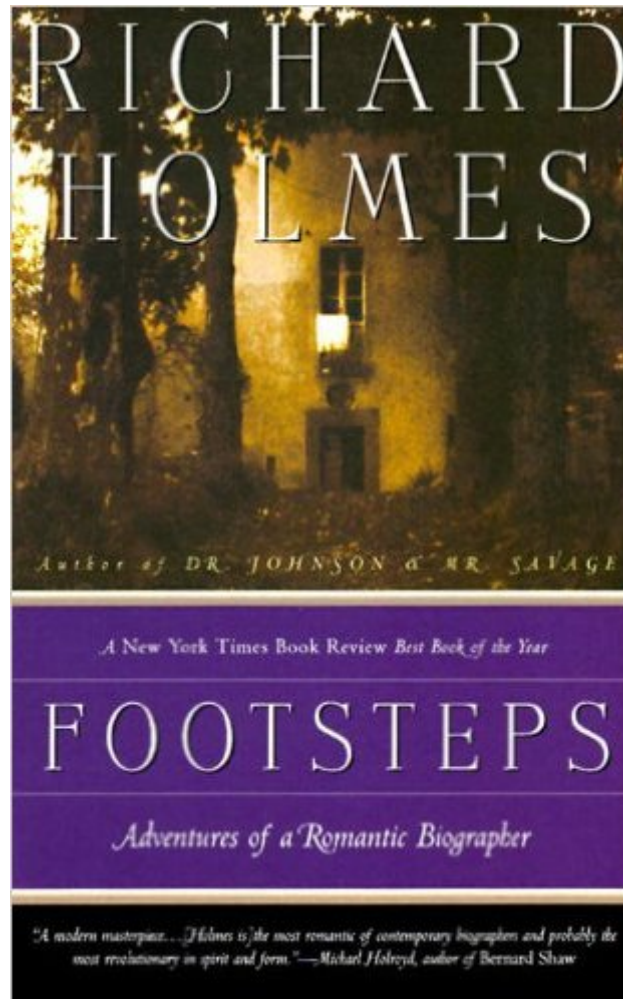


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Footsteps: Adventures Of A Romantic Biographer



Synopsis

This is the story of a young English biographer travelling alone through Europe in search of the romantic writers of the past. It begins when the author is 18, sleeping rough in the remote hills of the Cevenness and ends when he is 30, deciding to come home from his attic room in Paris. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the kind of book at which Holmes, in my view, excels. I'm not that particularly fond of his painstaking mammoth biographies of Shelley and Coleridge because, well, they're too run-of-the-mill and not all that much fun to read.-In other words, just the opposite of books like this one. This type of book, where the relationship between Holmes and the author he is writing about is constantly in play add a mystery and a haunted quality inherent in the time elapsed between Holmes' time and the author's that keeps the readers attention constantly transfixed (or, at least, this reader's). As Holmes himself puts it, "The material surfaces of life are continually breaking down, sloughing off, changing, almost as fast as human skin." Examples: The passage on Shelley's view of the double, the "ghost of the living person" the view of which signified the shadow world invading this one; Shelley's view that this is what was happening to him just before he drowned himself is the most affecting passage I've read on Shelley's end, and together with the photograph of the Casa Magni, which I'd never actually seen, and whose setting Mary Shelley said caused them to be in touch with the unreal sent shivers up my spine. It's not to be missed.-The section on Nerval

was also interesting, as were the others. Curiously, the same sort of thing seems to have affected Nerval "...Here began for me what I shall call the overflowing of dreams into real life." Both sections are excellent and Holmes' speculation that "Nerval's whole work was a form of suicide note" seems right on the mark. The other sections are intriguing as well, but these two haunted me the most. In a moment of brave self-exposure where Holmes is following Shelley's footsteps in Rome, he recounts a dinner where they toasted Shelley as a fellow-exile and his name "rang to the roof." Holmes writes, "I sat there looking at my plate dangerously close to tears. I...determined to write a book for people like them too, who would never read it, people who have lost most things except hope."-You've succeeded Mr Holmes.

Beginning with a journey tracing Stevenson's walking tour in France, Holmes shows himself to be both a remarkable adventurer and writer. The thing that comes out clearly when he discovers the ruins of a bridge crossed by Stevenson is that the past is the past. And while it has an impact on the world today, it is gone. If you only read it for the first essay, it is well worth the money. The other essays explore other themes that affect biographers. A superb book that should be read by anyone interested in the mysterious relationship between biographer and subject.

Richard Holmes is a man profoundly obsessed with other people's lives. This book reflects the process of how the author struggled to come to terms with the mysterious past which is flitting away from us. It is also a book which tries to answer the question "Why should it matter?" Whether hunting for the Shelleys in Italy or pursuing Stevenson in the Cevennes, Holmes manages to convey the feeling that it does matter, that these people had their share in shaping European culture and literature. However, there is a price to be paid if one aims to bring ghosts back to life. The author is ever balancing on the fine edge of cutting himself off from the present, of falling into the abyss of the past and never wake up again, and he is painfully aware of this. Holmes seems to conceive of biography as a temporary annihilation of his own self in order to grasp the world that his subjects moved in. The literary outcome is a great and full picture. On a personal level, it is trauma. This book will (if it is not already) be a classic for anyone remotely interested in reading or writing biography.

This is one of the most addictive books that I have ever read - the language is rich and the stories are fascinating. Holmes interweaves his own experiences with short biographical sketches of Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Wollstonecraft and Percy Shelley. A great book to take on a trip or vacation.

I read this the spring it came out, the spring I learned that once again there would be no summer vacation, no breaking free of the time zone. As much as a book can stand in for actual experience, this did, and I got a rollicking review of Romantic figures in the bargain. Holmes obviously conducts meticulous research, but he writes it up in a style that has the sweep of a fine novel. He is a master at marrying study and action.

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