

National Centre of Biography, ANU

Biography Workshop

Rhys Williams

From Carlyle to Plekhanov: The Role of the Individual in History

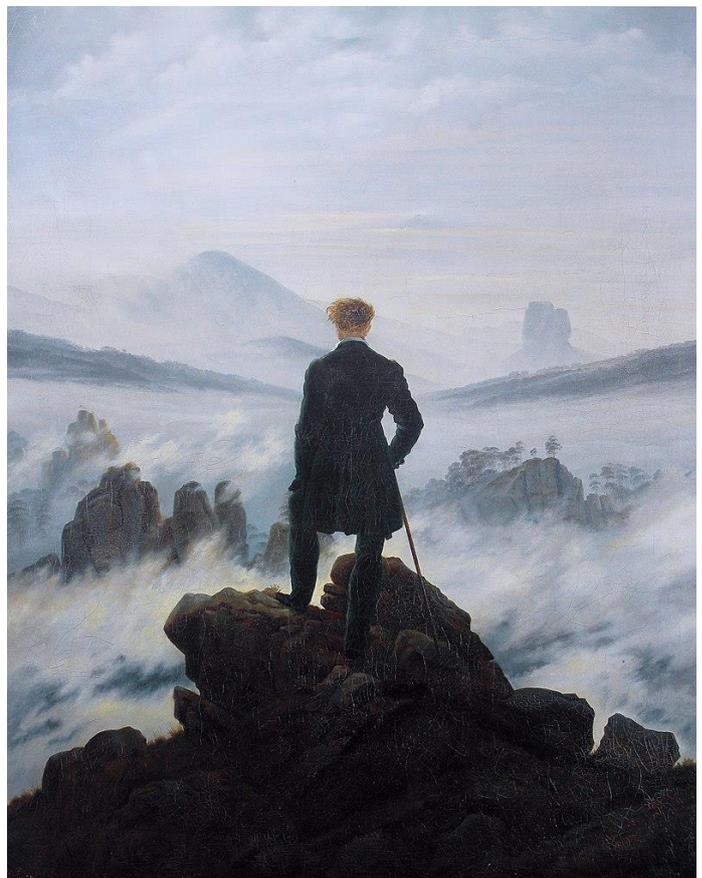
Date: Thursday 28 March 2019
Venue: Jean Martin Room,
Beryl Rawson Building,
13 Ellery Cres, ANU
Time: 11:00 am until c. 12.30 pm*
Contact: Nicole.McLennan@anu.edu.au

The role of the individual in history has always been a concern for historians and biographers. Do individuals shape events or do events shape individuals?

This workshop examines this old problem through the ideas of Thomas Carlyle and Georgi Plekhanov, the two historians who probably have most influenced our understanding of the role of the individual in history. Carlyle developed, effectively, the best modern example of the 'Great Man theory of history' – in *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1840). Plekhanov developed, effectively, the best Marxist thinking on the role of the individual in history – in *On the Role of the Individual in History* (1898). These two thinkers, in their opposing stances, continue to shape the way historians understand and deal with the issue.

Key questions explored in this workshop include: What is the relationship between the individual and history? What is the relationship between the individual and society? Can the individual change the course of history? Can the individual break from history? Is history really the "biography of Great Men"?

RHYS WILLIAMS is a graduate of the Australian National University and the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is a PhD candidate in the School of History, ANU, working towards a thesis on British Socialism and Australia: 1880-1914.



Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, c.1818
(Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany)

* **NOTE:** In 2019 the workshop start time is **11:00 am**