

*Vies d'écrivains, vies d'artistes: Espagne, France, Italie, XVIe–XVIIe siècles.* Matteo Residori, Hélène Tropé, Danielle Boillet, and Marie-Madeleine Fragonard, eds. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2014. 352 pp. €26.50.

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*Vies d'écrivains, vies d'artistes* is the result of two research projects — “Formes et idées de la Renaissance au Lumières” and “Les cultures de l’Europe méditerranéenne occidentale” — both linked to the DEFI (Dialogues Espagne, France et Italie) program. It is a miscellaneous work dedicated to a deep analysis of biographies with the purpose of investigating them in their writing process and in their relation to Renaissance societies. The volume is certainly directed to scholars but should not be ignored by all lovers of biographies because of its different levels of reading and interpretation of this kind of writing.

The book is divided into four parts through which authors dissect biographies in their content and meaning, from the surface to their deepest points, giving readers the key to comprehend not only the life of the biography’s subject and the society in which he or she had lived, but also the life of all those who associated with him or her (biographers, readers, addressee, publishers). The first part, “Dinamiques fondatrices,” is thus focused on the ways, and on the sources, that brought someone to compose a writer’s biography, with particular attention paid to the relationship between writers and their works and the role, or the use, of the latter in the composition of the biography.

More attention to men and women is given in the second part of the volume, “Le projet biographique, ses acteurs et ses publics.” This section focuses on the relations

between authors and addressees or readers, as well as on the latter's importance for the biographies' contents, confirming the strong influence addressees and readers exert. The section also focuses on the importance of the social and political environment for biographers' work.

The attention given to biographers and their contexts brings the readers of *Vies* deeper into comprehending biography in general, with the third part of the volume specifically dedicated to enlightening us to the role of writers ("Auteur: Une identité problématique"). In a time when writing was not recognized as a job, a biography not only described someone else's life, but also served as an identification instrument for the biographer, too. In this sense, a biography described the life of more than one person, and more than one private or social environment. It could also constitute one or more ways of teaching another how to live. This aspect introduces us to the fourth part of the volume, dedicated to the pedagogical and political role of biographies, with attention paid to the manner in which they created aesthetic rules or influenced political ideas through the artists' glory. When we reach the end of this volume, we therefore clearly discover that these four parts, expressed by different examples of biographies, constitute four levels of a single biography's interpretation.

Nothing concerning a person and his or her relations with society seems to be forgotten in *Vies*, confirming what has been debated for years by historiography: the role of microhistory in comprehending macrohistory, and vice versa, by enlightening — through the story of a single individual or a limited group of individuals — the story of a specific place in a specific period of time. The volume is a further development of what has been expressed not only by the *Annales* for decades, but also by historiography since the end of the 1970s, when discussions about the objective value of biographies became more intense than in the past, and have been increasingly so over the years.

In a scientific environment that is still skeptical about the real value of biographies from a historical point of view, *Vies* seems to certify their objective value, even in case of literary biographies. The biography is thus a precious instrument that not only helps us to further understand Renaissance societies, but it can also give to all contemporary researchers important suggestions about how we can write biography, and about the traps into which we could fall while doing it.

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