

VII col·loqui internacional Mimesi



Vides d'escriptors a l'Edat Moderna: retòrica, història i poètica

IV. POÈTICA I HISTORIOGRAFIA

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From lives to biographies. The poetics of life writing in the modern age

Biographical studies place between the last third of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century the emergence of the new ways of writing lives that would characterize literary biography. The chronological framework is large and it suggests that the changes that leave behind the lives of poets and shape literary biographies are diverse and manifest themselves gradually and at different rhythms. The *Lives of English Poets* by Samuel Johnson, published in the 1780s and often considered a paradigm of literary biography exemplify quite well these slow changes. Johnson's *Lives* were initially conceived as short writings that had to contain a selection of biographical news and critical comments to make an introduction to the works of the poets. These short preliminary lives were meant to be read separately. But some of them ended up being extensive stories full of biographical anecdotes and theoretical and historical considerations. Johnson's writings were eventually arranged in volumes, in a sequence that allowed to interpret the lives of the poets as connected episodes in the history of English literature. Johnson leaves behind the apologetic attitude of many early modern life writers and openly criticizes many of the poets he writes about. Johnson admits that biographers often turn to their imagination because they know little about the poets' lives and characters. He is interested in issues that had not previously been addressed, such as the relationship of authors with printers and booksellers. However, Johnson still believes that the main purpose of the biography is to reveal the character of the poet and that, to do so, it

is very convenient for the biographer to know him or her personally. And his writings continue to combine biographical narration with critical disquisition and historical scholarship.

Knowing, then, that the evolution of life writing during the modern age demands to proceed with caution, my purpose is to explain significant changes in the genre based on the examination and comparison of lives and biographies of Hispanic authors written between the 16th and 19th centuries. I will focus on the poetics of life writing, that is, on issues that allow us to detect changes in the ways of understanding the principles, methods and purposes of life writing devoted to poets and writers. In order to have a sufficiently representative material, I will use the “Biblioteca de ‘biografías’” created within the project ‘Sujeto e institución literaria en la Edad Moderna’, conducted by the research group P.A.S.O. at the University of Córdoba. In this online library are available several biographies of authors such as Garcilaso de la Vega, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Alonso de Ercilla, Lope de Vega, Luis de Góngora and Quevedo, written throughout the modern age.

<http://www.uco.es/servicios/ucopress/silem/index.php/bibliotecas/biografias>