

literary critics. Sahlins is remarkably able to demonstrate an impressive knowledge of the time period without ever falling into pedantry or obscurity. The argument is fully documented and clearly presented. Even for the non-animal lover, one finds intense pleasure in reading this important page of French history through the stories of the animals.

Élodie Bénard. *Les vies d'écrivains (1550–1750): Contribution à une archéologie du genre biographique*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2019. 440 pp. \$57.60. Review by IVY DYCKMAN, INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR.

The notion of writers writing about the lives of renowned writers is neither a current nor unusual practice. These works attract a diverse audience. Authors might glean insight into the process of constructing a literary biography. Readers might be drawn to the intimacies of a writer's life. Others might view a critical biography as a cultural, political, and/or social barometer of a discrete historical moment. All might simply be both intrigued and inspired by the life of a remarkably talented person and thus consider the biography a tribute, a way to honor brilliance despite character flaws. The American author, poet, and critic Jay Parini wrote on this very topic in the September 16, 2015 international edition of *The Guardian*. Having just completed a non-fiction account of the life of Gore Vidal, he was prompted to draw up a list of his ten preferred literary biographers since the post-World War II era. As he noted in that brief piece, "important lives make for Important Lives." The author of *Les vies d'écrivains* would most surely concur.

Élodie Bénard's treatment of French literary biographies over a two-hundred-year period is a reworked version of her doctoral dissertation on this topic. The original subtitle, "*développement et mutations d'un genre (1570–1770)*" (7), more accurately describes the way in which she tackled her investigation, notwithstanding the slight modification of the time frame. Although the seventeenth century is the primary focus of this journal's readers, the changes that occurred during this period do not begin and end within the confines of an arbitrary time designation. The biographical form of the sixteenth century impacted its successors in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and all of the following

centuries, including our own. In fact, certain Lives of writers (*les Vies d'écrivains*), with the upper case "V" or "L" denoting biography as opposed to just existence, were written posthumously, in a later century and literary era. Bénard's meticulous description of the metamorphosis of the literary biography over the course of the early modern period is supported by the extensive footnotes and bibliography as well as the appendix of questionable attributions. That her study follows the strictures of typical French thesis construction facilitates the logical flow and clarity of her arguments and examples. Accordingly, she identifies three principal phases in the evolution of literary biography during the years in question: *la période rhétorique*, *la période mondaine*, and *la période historique*. Together they tell the story of what we today recognize as biography and account for the reasons, as listed above in the opening paragraph, why the public would want to read about the Lives of distinguished writers.

The first part of Bénard's investigation deals with the beginnings and gradual metamorphosis of literary biography. In the opening chapter, she covers the years 1550–1650, *la période rhétorique*. During that time, homage made to extraordinary individuals essentially excluded *hommes de lettres*, who were not considered deserving of the praise reserved for illustrious statesmen and military leaders as well as for miracle-performing clergy. Funeral orations of antiquity provided the template for eloquently honoring the Life of a great one. They were formulaic, based on the rules of rhetoric, specifically *l'enkômion*, which expressed praise for virtues, heroic actions, and various other distinctions such as education, family, and even physical qualities. This type of biography or Life, *Vie*, as it was then considered, somewhat embellished reality. It portrayed the ideal man of the time, *l'homme de cour*, a person of noble or aristocratic background. One of Bénard's examples of *la Vie éloquente* is Claude Binet's *Discours de la vie de Pierre de Ronsard* (1586), written on the occasion of the funeral of the "Prince des Poètes" (31). Binet idealized Ronsard as a gentleman of the court who, as a *nouveau Virgile*, ensured the transfer of Greek and Roman letters (the concept of *translatio studii*). By depicting him as a celebrated French poet, a direct descendant of the poets of antiquity, Binet transformed the ancient "*Vie d'illustre*" into a biographical tribute composed in French.

La période mondaine, which encompasses the latter half of the seventeenth century, is the subject of the second and final chapter of the first part of Bénard's study. From 1650 to 1700, the concept of a grand and eloquent biographical depiction evolves into a more realistic portrait whose non-heroic subjects resemble *honnêtes gens*, an audience consisting of the upper and middle classes. *La Vie éloquente* would finally become *la Vie d'écrivain*, a "*petite Vie*" (117) as opposed to one that was grandiose. The author whose life was showcased would be portrayed as an *écrivain-galant homme*. The purpose of this refashioned biography was to make the gentleman author attractive to people like him. The device of the anecdote was incorporated into the Life to render it less pedantic and more realistic for readers who expected veracity as well as pleasure and diversion from such a text. Bénard offers several examples as evidence of *la Vie d'écrivain*. Among the Lives referenced, she brings special attention to those written about Malherbe, Cyrano de Bergerac, Molière, La Fontaine, and Benserade.

Bénard concludes her thesis in the second part with *la période historique*, which encompasses the first half of the eighteenth century. It is here that the reader can clearly recognize the beginnings of the modern-day literary biography. The *persona* of the writer appears less as a hero or *galant homme* who appeals to certain defined audiences. By contextualizing him as someone whose actions are subordinate to reactions to and observations of his world, the focus shifts to the interiority of the writer. This deeper, seemingly psychological aspect of an *homme de lettres* is due to both the quest for a truthful yet intimate representation. Thanks to the influence of *Mémoires* and *nouvelles* in the eighteenth century, writers as subjects of biographies are perceived as both historical and fictional (*romanesque*) figures, which render them closely identifiable with the public at large.

Bénard's analysis serves as a worthy contribution to literary history. Often, we do not realize that a celebrated author is not larger than life and that it took at least two centuries to finally conceive of the writer as an authentic person whose vulnerabilities mirrored those of many of his readers. We learn, for example, that Jean-Léonor Le Gallois Grimarest brought this personal side of Molière to light in his biography of the noted playwright, *La Vie de M. de Molière* (1705). While the public may have viewed Molière as a severe, witty critique of French

society, he was, according to the astute observations of Grimarest, a philosopher at heart who could not seek pleasure in contemplating the world because of the turmoil in his private life: a young, unfaithful wife to monitor; a theatrical troupe to manage; and a king to please.

Jeffery N. Peters. *The Written World: Space, Literature, and the Chorological Imagination in Early Modern France*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press. 2018. xii + 260 pp. + 9 illus. \$99.95. Review by THOMAS P. FINN, OHIO NORTHERN UNIVERSITY.

With his *The Written World: Space, Literature, and the Chorological Imagination in Early Modern France*, Jeffery Peters assumes the unenviable task of discovering what and where literary art is and how it comes into being. The result is a rigorously researched work, providing rare and penetrating perspectives on a number of prominent texts from the titular era. With abundant references to works from classical antiquity to today, in an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion, Peters discusses the ineffable Greek concept of “chora,” defined several ways, (often describing what it is not) to explore its possibilities as a “locating principle” (17) that leads to “an event of language” (25) without having any location or existence itself.

In his introduction, Peters explores the neglected role of space in literary art. He explains Early Modern texts are thought to extract readers from their particular “physical world” because it is secondary to the universal values these works convey (6–7). Countering this notion, Peters reminds his readers of new discoveries in astronomy during the era, which made authors and readers more mindful of the notion of space. Stating that space’s essence is neither matter nor “absolute nothingness,” and therefore unknowable (10), Peters shows readers a path to approaching the Greek concept of “chora” using Plato’s *Timaeus*.

A complex discussion of what Plato thinks “chora” is—a kind of “betweenness,” “the excluded middle,” “a Kind invisible”—and is not—“space, a place,” a material substance, “an idea” (16–17)—ensues, and it is here Peters could have made a clearer connection to subsequently discussed texts so readers could better follow the complicated