



## CONSTRUCTING POETIC AUTHOR(ITY)S: RENAISSANCE, BARROCO AND ENLIGHTENMENT

### I. MÈTODES, USOS I FUNCIONS

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#### *Prescribed Lives: Biographical Discourse in Early Modern Catalan Poetics*

I aim to illustrate the role of biography in the construction of the idea of the author in the early modern period using commentaries on authors and poets' lives in the Catalan context in the 16th, 17th and 18th century. From the 1500s onwards biographical narrative production intensifies and there is a pronounced expansion in the range of biographical subjects. More and more attention starts getting paid to the lives of scholars, artists, and writers, and there is a significant increase in the number of biographies about historical and contemporary poets. Modern authors begin to merit biographical accounts, which are often put about shortly after their deaths, frequently in the form of short stories published on the opening pages of their works. Many of these accounts appear alongside tributes and justifications and incorporate discourses with canonizing pretensions. The growing importance of the biography in literary culture in the early modern period manifests itself in two ways: in changes to poets' actual lives, which, in form and function, begin to encompass more and gain in complexity; and with the emergence of genres of literary criticism where the biography has an important role, comparable to that of writers' libraries, dictionaries of writers and literary histories.

A number of biographical accounts explain poets' lives using strikingly similar interpretational patterns. They use the same set of topics and, in this way, manage to construct a typical, exemplary, normative idea of what a canonical author's life ought to look like. It is my hope that commentary on Catalan writers and poets' lives can help illustrate representative, relevant aspects of biography and its place in early modern literary studies. In the first place I explain how the old tradition principles, functions and rules of rhetoric governing early modern biographical writing legitimize and encourage the construction of the typical literary life. I go on to demonstrate how attributes

sanctioning literary excellence in the Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment periods that have been rewritten and transposed for biographies take part in this process. To conclude I describe the growing tendency among biographers towards using their authors' literary works in order to demonstrate the truthfulness and utility of their own accounts, I then show to what extent this tendency contributes to giving the biography more weight in literary theory and criticism.