

2008

Review of *The Reception of Plutarch's 'Lives' in
Fifteenth-Century Italy*, by Marianne Pade

Julia H. Gaisser

Bryn Mawr College, jgaisser@brynmawr.edu

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Gaisser, Julia H. Review of *The Reception of Plutarch's 'Lives' in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, by Marianne Pade. *Renaissance Quarterly* 61 (2008): 499-501.

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Marianne Pade. *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2007. 644 pp. + 18 color pls. index. append. illus. bibl. \$105. ISBN: 978-87-635-0532-1.

Plutarch's *Lives* were essential reading in the Italian Renaissance, especially for powerful men who wanted to emulate or be seen to emulate the great politicians and generals of antiquity. In this book Marianne Pade demonstrates the point by tracing and discussing the sixty-two Latin translations of Plutarch's *Lives* made from 1400 to 1462. In the first volume she discusses each translation with attention to its translator, *ambiente*, and dedicatee. In the second she provides a manuscript catalogue, transcriptions of prefaces, and lists of translations, owners, and scribes.

This is an ambitious project. Charles Martindale has said in what has become a famous dictum: "Meaning is always realized at the point of reception" (*Redeeming the Text*, 3). In this study there are many points of reception, which include not only the seventeen different translators, but also their teachers, friends, and dedicatees, as well as the dozens of manuscripts containing the translations, and in

some cases the scribes and owners of those manuscripts. In each instance context is everything, for in studies of reception one must know at least as much about the receivers as about what it is they have received. Pade has analyzed both Plutarch's *Lives* and the lives of her Renaissance protagonists, relating the intellectual, social, and political affiliations of each to his interest in a particular *Life*. Finding her way through a mass of primary material, she argues — for the most part persuasively — that the reception of the *Lives* supports the ideology of the cities where they were translated and the self-presentation of the patrons to whom they were sent.

Pade structures her discussion geographically and chronologically rather than by tracing individual *Lives* or humanists. This was undoubtedly the best course, for it reveals the close correlation between cities, their ideologies, and particular *Lives* chosen for translation. It works best in the first half of the work, where geography and chronology closely coincide and there are only a few translators; but it begins to feel constraining in the second half, where it might have been useful to adopt a more flexible structure. Some translations do not fit well into the scheme; these are treated under rubrics like “Northern Italy: Other Translations” (chapter 5) and “The Remaining *Lives*” (chapter 8). It is also hard to follow the reception of Plutarch by any one humanist over time. Guarino's translations are discussed in three different chapters, depending on whether he was writing in Florence, Venice, or Ferrara. In chapter 7 strict adherence to chronology produces a constant and confusing alternation of translators and dedicatees.

In general Pade makes a good case for her thesis that humanists chose particular *Lives* to translate in accordance with the self-presentation of the cities and patrons they hoped to please. But the translators seem to have treated their cities and patrons somewhat differently. My impression is that up to about 1430 *Lives* were translated to foster the self-image of cities, and that the evidence for the association is circumstantial (that is, the translator does not make an explicit connection between a city and a particular *Life*). After around 1430, it seems, translations are directed to the self-presentation of individuals more than of cities, the connections are spelled out, and a given *Life* is associated with the particular circumstances of the dedicatee. If this is correct, it would be interesting to speculate on the reasons for the translators' shift in emphasis and method.

Pade suggests that the translators often imitate the Latin of Plutarch's sources: the style of Leonardo Bruni's *Cato minor*, for example, owes much to Valerius Maximus. But she says little about their possible additions, subtractions, distortions, or reshaping of Plutarch's content. One way to get at this might be to compare two translations of the same *Life* — perhaps the *Themistocles* of Guarino translated for a Venetian admiral in 1417 with that of Lapo da Castiglionchio translated for Cosimo de' Medici in the 1430s, or the translations of *Timoleon* by Antonio Pacini, Andrea Biglia, and Giovanni Aurispa.

Quibbles aside, Pade's study is a substantial contribution to the study of fifteenth-century Italian humanism. The transcriptions and indices of her second

volume also provide an invaluable resource for other scholars. The book is beautifully produced and generously illustrated.

JULIA HAIG GAISSER
Bryn Mawr College