



The Lives of Michel Foucault

By David Macey

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When he died of an AIDS-related condition in 1984, Michel Foucault had become the most influential French philosopher since the end of World War II. His powerful studies of the creation of modern medicine, prisons, psychiatry, and other methods of classification have had a lasting impact on philosophers, historians, critics, and novelists the world over. But as public as he was in his militant campaigns on behalf of prisoners, dissidents, and homosexuals, he shrouded his personal life in mystery.

In *The Lives of Michel Foucault* -- written with the full cooperation of Daniel Defert, Foucault's former lover -- David Macey gives the richest account to date of Foucault's life and work, informed as it is by the complex issues arising from his writings.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

French social philosopher Michel Foucault, whose work was a cry against the confinement or regulation of prisoners, workers, psychiatric patients and sexual desires, shaved his head in order to reveal his true face, or so he told friends. Yet Foucault, who died of AIDS in 1984 at the age of 57, was extremely reticent about his personal life. A homosexual, he generally kept his distance from the gay and feminist movements and, by this account, made surprisingly ignorant remarks about rape. Macey's (*Lacan in Contexts*) revealing, careful biography, which traces Foucault's constantly evolving thought against the backdrop of his political activism and travels, draws on interviews with friends and colleagues and on the cooperation of Foucault's former lover, Daniel Defert. Details of Foucault's experimentation with LSD and opium, his near-death experience after being hit by a car, and his activism against racism, the Vietnam War and prison conditions round out a portrait of a versatile thinker who remains a personal enigma.

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From Kirkus Reviews

Elusive and private, ``the lives'' of Michel Foucault (1926- 84) include the many public roles that he assumed--as philosopher, academic, historian, political activist, and homosexual--roles that both reflected and helped shape the character of postwar France. Here, working from a thin paper trail (Foucault destroyed many of his personal documents) but with the recollections of the philosopher's former lover and friends, Macey (the scholarly *Lacan in Contexts*, 1988--not reviewed) offers an intellectual life of the influential thinker. Foucault--the second of three children born to a provincial physician--studied at the *cole Normale Sup*, where he met Louis Althusser (*The Future Lasts Forever*, p. 1427) and Jacques Derrida.

Although Foucault preferred Paris, where he became a celebrity, he traveled to Sweden (whose generally sedate citizens he scandalized with his drinking and his Jaguar), Tunisia, Japan, Brazil, and California, where he explored the bathhouses and contracted AIDS. Foucault shared what he called a ``passion'' with Daniel Defert, his companion from 1963 on--and the source of much of the information here. While the philosopher believed that his true self was in his works, he effaced that self with an objective style, deflecting attention away from himself and universalizing his private preoccupations. His histories of madness, prisons, and sexuality all employ a system of study that dismisses authors and individuals in favor of ``*pist, mS*'' cores of ideas that Foucault pursued in what he called an ``archaeology'' of culture. Foucault, Macey makes clear, related everything from the most abstract to the most trivial in a unique way that reflected his own preoccupations, as well as that of his contemporaries: Camus, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Barthes, Lvi-Strauss, et al. Macey does an excellent job of tracing the development of his subject's thought, but except for Foucault's public image--shaved head, leather clothes, boyish body--his life remains a shadow. A cautious and respectful study--avoiding luridness and gossip while preserving its subject's dignity--that Foucault himself might have authorized. -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

"Admirable...yields a vivid picture of Foucault."

-- *New Republic*

"David Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault* is the third, and probably the last, Foucault biography to appear in English.... It is also the best: fuller in its source and freer in their use...preferable, in terms of moral

intelligence, maturity and poise." -- The Times Literary Supplement

Users Review

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