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Faith Beasley, ed., *Teaching Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Women Writers*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, *Options for Teaching* 33, 2011. xii + 379 pp. Works Cited and index. \$40.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-60329-095-1; \$25.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-60329-8.

Review by Anne R. Larsen, Hope College.

This collection of thirty-two stellar contributions by outstanding teachers and scholars is a wonderful addition to the MLA's *Options for Teaching* series. It is a must-read for faculty already teaching or thinking of teaching a course on or including early modern French women writers. Two major reasons account for the usefulness of this book. Each chapter is written as an aid to the classroom, and each is focused on recovering the tradition of the cultural and historical participation of French women writers. As Faith Beasley puts it in her excellent introduction, the collection is founded on the fact that "women and men in the early modern period in France worked together, in dialogue, to create their cultural and literary landscape" (p. 3). This puts to rest the notions that only male canonical writers such as Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau and others need to be taught or that courses with only women's voices are legitimate substitutes. Rather, the dialogue between the men and the women at the heart of the French cultural enterprise needs to be incorporated in a wide variety of courses. This book shows the way.

How can the thoughts of early men and women interest twenty-first century students? Beasley aptly notes that the questions seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers asked were universal. They addressed the relationship between the individual and society, access to education, gender differences (whether biologically or socially determined), the roles of women and men in child rearing, mothers and daughters, issues of identity, the nature of taste, cultural relativism, and so on. As Beasley writes, these are questions that "often still occupy the front pages of newspapers and stimulate discussion on *Facebook*" (p. 4). Such questions were articulated and debated in the salons, social spaces convened in a woman's home, all of which drew a large segment of polite and intellectual society including philosophers, scientists, dramatists, scholars, and writers of all literary genres. The contributors to this volume focus on how women writers across a broad spectrum addressed these questions.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part one, "Cultural and Literary Contexts," identifies female writers to include in courses so as to show that they not only enrich but can actually "alter a course dramatically when women's participation is taken into account" (p. 10). Part two, "Teaching Specific Texts," analyzes both well-known and understudied women writers, indicating how to pair them with canonical male writers. Part three, "Teaching Specific Courses," offers course syllabi that contain many of the same writers and issues discussed in the first two parts.

My comments will take account of the type of course offered and how the female writers/thinkers are incorporated. Thus, rather than listing and commenting on individual contributions as they appear chronologically in the three parts, I will group the contributions under six broad disciplinary headings: literature, social history, philosophy, the sciences, the arts, and religion. While the essays in each of these categories frequently overlap, as did early modern disciplines, broad differences are also evident given the nature of the course. I cite the work in its English translation.

The bulk of the essays concern literature. Nicolas Paige, in “The Complexities of the French Classical Lexicon,” leads students into the literature of the period by examining the evolving lexicon of love from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century. The service model of the Middle Ages and Renaissance that centered on the male lover “serving” his mistress to obtain her favors evolved into the heroic love ethos of Corneille and Madeleine de Scudéry’s “inclination” before moving on to the “sensibilité” of the eighteenth century. Thus, close examination of how language functions in early modern literature warns students of the dangers of anachronism. Elizabeth Goldsmith’s “Letters and the Epistolary Novel” pairs Mme de Sévigné’s famous letters with those of her contemporary Charlotte-Elisabeth de Bavière, the princess Palatine, and those of Madame de Maintenon and the Princess des Ursins. The Princess Palatine offers a sharp and amusing critique of court life, while the exchange between Mme de Maintenon and the princesse des Ursins reflects on their lives and the history of their period.

Perry Gethner, in “Women and the Theatrical Tradition,” identifies three major categories of plays from which to select: those related to the *querelle des femmes*, to ruling monarchs and queens, and to friendship between women. Pairings might include a play by a woman with a canonical play by a male writer as, for instance, Mme de Villedieu’s *The Favorite* and Molière’s *The Misanthrope*. Katherine Ann Jensen’s “Daughters as Maternal Masterpieces: Teaching Mother-Daughter Relations in Lafayette and Vigée Lebrun” is especially interesting in its focus on mother-daughter relations and issues of identity. Jensen begins her course with classic theoretical works by Adrienne Rich, Jane Flax, and Nancy Chodorow. She then studies excerpts from Francois de Grenaille’s conduct book *The Virtuous Daughter* (1640) to show how Grenaille enlisted aristocratic mothers in the reproduction of patriarchal structures. In the *Princess of Clèves* by Mme de Lafayette, the ideology of mother-daughter reflexivity calls forth “maternal narcissism” to reproduce in the daughter a maternal alter ego. The mirror dynamic between the princess and her mother is shattered when the princess falls in love with Nemours. Similarly, the artist Vigée Lebrun in her memoirs sees her daughter as her masterpiece, but her daughter’s choice of a man Vigée Lebrun thinks is unsuitable puts them on a collision course.

Allison Stedman pairs Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier’s fairy tale *The Enchantments of Eloquence* (1695) with Racine’s *Andromaque* (1667) and Charles Perrault’s *The Fairies* (1697) to show the deep differences in view between the male classical canonical writers and L’Héritier’s writing, which Stedman refers to as emanating from the “worldly” matrix of salon culture. While Racine’s characters “sublimate their private desires (passion) to their public obligations (duty),” L’Héritier’s figures value the “privacy, authenticity, and self-expression” cultivated in the salons (p. 104). Suzan van Dijk’s focus is on the reactions of contemporary male critics to narrative topoi in the writings of three well-known eighteenth-century women writers, Françoise de Graffigny, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, and Isabelle de Charrière. The narrative topoi are the unfaithfulness of the male lover, the marriage of the heroine, and the heroine’s death. She concludes that the variations each writer brought to these topoi went unappreciated and were not fully recognized. The negative critical reception to their works shows “the originality of these women’s interventions in the literary field” (p. 164).

The remaining ten studies of works by literary women span one hundred and fifty years, from Scudéry’s *Clélie* (1654–60) to Olympe de Gouges’s *The Slavery of Blacks* (1789). Again, great insights into teaching these texts highlight the strong pedagogical usefulness of the collection. Kathleen Wine includes the first of five parts of Scudéry’s *Clélie* in a course on fiction of the old régime to underscore its psychological vocabulary, its aesthetic rewards, and the afterlife of its conventions in later novels (p. 170). She guides students through the interaction of plot twists with psychological analysis to underscore that Scudéry’s narrative intention all along was to show the aesthetic pleasure of suspense and delay of which her famous “Carte de Tendre” is the supreme embodiment.

Roxanne Decker Lalande teaches Mme de Villedieu’s last play, “The Favorite,” as a reinterpretation of Corneille’s *The Cid* and Molière’s *The Misanthrope*. Villedieu’s “distinctly feminine plot twist” ushers the play into a space “between tragedy, serious drama, and comedy” (p. 241), giving students an

understanding of the neoclassical paradigm through a comparative analysis. Volker Schröder, in “Verse and Versatility: The Poetry of Antoinette Deshoulières,” introduces the extraordinarily diverse poetry of a woman poet largely forgotten until the twenty-first century. Schröder argues that any selection for the classroom must include not only the idyllic poems on nature, but Deshoulières’s dialectical poems reflecting her engagement with the philosophical and moral debates of her time that indicate her rooted in the epicurean naturalism revived at the start of the seventeenth century by Pierre Gassendi. Donna Kuizenga pairs Mme de Villegaignon’s *The Memoirs of the Life of Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* with the English Delarivier Manley’s *History of Rivella*. Both pseudo- autobiographies “blur the line between fact and fiction,” which gives them “no easy conclusion, no pinning down of the heroine” (p. 256), hence the freedom to manipulate the conventions. In her highly original study, Harriet Stone uses the camera and works of art to bring Mme de Lafayette’s *The Princess of Cleves* and Françoise de Graffigny’s *Letters from a Peruvian Woman* into greater perceptual focus. By having students discuss the foreground and background of photos using the zoom lens, and the effect of the *mises en abyme* in Nicolas Poussin’s *Autoportrait* (1650) and François Boucher’s *Breakfast* (1739), she brings clarity to the complex compositions of foreground and background in the novels. Her perceptive analyses of these paintings shows what has been excluded in them but included in the novels, as, for instance, the exploitative assimilation of exotic items in Boucher’s painting which is unmasked in Graffigny’s novel.

The same narrative unmasking occurs in the next two studies by Laure Marcellesi on Mme de Monbart’s *Tahitian Letters* (1748), and Lisa Beckstrand on Olympe de Gouges’s play *The Slavery of Blacks*. Monbart counters the philosophes’ (Rousseau and Diderot) “anticolonial discourse by grounding it in the suffering of the female body” (p. 270) and exposing their silence regarding colonization and sexual slavery. As Marcellesi puts it, Monbart “demystifies the male-centered fantasies of Tahiti” (p. 272). Gouges’ play was attacked by colonialists and their lobbyists in France as a tract against slavery, resulting in a *lettre de cachet* demanding her imprisonment. In the play a black heroine challenges the colonial system and imagines a utopia freed of slaves and their owners. Deborah Steinberger eschews the genre-related literary survey to focus instead on the theme of love in French seventeenth-century literature. One of her course methods is to simulate a literary salon in which students create, collaborate, converse, and critique one another’s projects. She has them compose riddles, maxims, portraits, and fairy tales leading to a class anthology. What better way to involve students in developing their own critical skills and creativity in the context of the literary and intellectual movements of the period! Katherine Montwieler includes in a world literature survey course pairings of English and French writers: Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) and Lafayette’s *Princess of Cleves* (1678); Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1735) and Graffigny’s *Letters from a Peruvian Woman* (1747); and Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Duras’s *Ourika* (1823). Lastly, in a history of ideas course, Francis Mathieu teaches moralist literature by including French women writers. On the philosophical theme of *divertissement* (“diversion”), for instance, in Pascal’s *Thoughts* and Lafayette’s *Princess of Cleves*, Mathieu reveals how central Pascal’s thought was to Lafayette.

Social History, the next largest disciplinary section, has seven contributions, ranging from early modern women and the history of the book (Claire Goldstein) and the history of the salon (Faith Beasley), to Marie Antoinette in myth and history (Caroline Weber), wife abuse and marital discord in eighteenth-century France (Mary Trouille), *politesse* in Scudéry’s *Conversations* (David Harrison), the historical insights of Mme de Lafayette (Louise Horowitz) and Mme d’Aulnoy (Gabrielle Verdier). All offer helpful ideas on teaching. Goldstein’s students scrutinize early printed books for their title pages and *privilèges* in special collections reading rooms. Beasley presents ways to incorporate the recent scholarship on the salons into a variety of courses. Weber includes contemporary women’s memoirs on Marie Antoinette to indicate how women, too, engaged in political myth making. Trouille includes a wide variety of genres in a course on *Wife-Abuse in Eighteenth-Century France*, from letters and memoirs to court testimonies, news articles, and fictional or fictionalized accounts, and leads students to ask questions on the motives, laws, attitudes and practices reflected in these texts. Harrison combines Scudéry’s dialogue on *politesse* with films, historical analysis of Louis XIV’s rule, and court accounts.

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Horowitz focuses on Lafayette's treatment of the Wars of Religion and the Fronde as major players in her novels, and Verdier discusses Mme d'Aulnoy's *Memoirs of the Court of Spain* (1690) and her travel log *The Lady's Travels into Spain* (1691) as history or hoax.

Contributions in philosophy, the sciences, the arts, and religion discuss again a wide variety of authors and a fascinating range of issues. Most compelling are the articles by John Lyons on the Marquise de Sévigné as a philosopher, Richard Goodkin on the central relationship between the heroine and Nemours in Lafayette's *Princess of Cleves* "in terms of Descartes's concepts of clarity and distinctness" (p. 189), and Chloé Hogg who, in "Early Modern Women and the Philosophical Tradition," pairs Elisabeth of Bohemia with Descartes and Scudéry with Pascal. Countering Sévigné's denials of being a "philosophe," Lyons argues that she was highly versed in the philosophical tradition, particularly the Catholic tradition and the work of the Jansenist Pierre Nicole who, with Antoine Arnauld, authored *Logic; or, The Art of Thinking Well*.

Contributions in the sciences include Holly Tucker's early modern women in anatomy and physiology, Mary Ellen Birkett and Ann Leone's discussion of the science of gardening and gardens in women's writings, and Juliette Cherbuliez, who shows us how worldly salon discourse intersects with history of science discourse in such works as Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), thus indicating that discipline-specific outlooks are a recent phenomenon and that our students need to think in a "pre-disciplinary" manner when taking a course on early modern society.

The arts include a striking article by Abby Zanger on women and iconography, specifically woman as icon in Hélienne de Crenne's writings, the images of Queens Anne of Austria and Maria-Theresa of Austria, the iconographer Claudine Stella (1636-97), and the painter Sophie Chéron's (1648-1711) reading of images of women. Finally, religion figures prominently in Henriette Goldwin's incisive study of the Huguenot journalist and memoirist Mme du Noyer and Thomas Carr's "Convent Writing in Eighteenth-Century France."

This wide-ranging volume, expertly edited by Faith Beasley, demonstrates that incorporating the voices of early modern women into a wide variety of courses enables one to recover the conversational culture and the gendered collective identity so central to the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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