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Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel, Eds. *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xxviii + 176 pp. Bibliography and index. \$49.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-226-305556-2.

Review by Michelle Marshman, Green River College.

In the year 1584, Marie le Jars de Gournay read the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne, an experience that proved life-changing. Four years later, Gournay was introduced to Montaigne and invited him to her family estate in Picardy. After spending three months with him, Gournay cast herself in the role of Montaigne's adopted daughter and, after his death in 1592, positioned herself as his editor and public defender. In addition, Gournay continued her own writing, frequenting literary salons patronized by Queen Marguerite and others. By the time of her death in 1645, Gournay had authored translations from classical Latin texts, essays, poems, and a novel; she corresponded with prominent women of letters such as Anna Maria van Schurman; and she participated in biting literary controversies of French language and prosody. In *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*, Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel edited and translated Gournay's novel, *The Promenade of Monsieur de Montaigne*, as well as three of her published essays. *The Promenade* and *The Apology for the Woman Writing* appear for the first time in English in this outstanding collection.

Apology for the Woman Writing and other Works is part of a series published by the University of Chicago Press and edited by Albert Rabil, Jr. and Margaret L. King. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe provides new translations and fresh editions of female authors writing on the *querelles des femmes* sparked by Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century. Past and projected works include translations of Anna Maria van Schurman, Veronica Franco, Lucrezia Tornabuoni de Medici, and Oliva Sabuca, writing on topics as varied as religious devotion, social customs, education, and medicine.

Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel previously worked together to translate and edit *Preface to the Essays of Michel de Montaigne by His Adoptive Daughter, Marie le Jars de Gournay*. They have partnered once again to provide Gournay greater exposure to an English-speaking audience. Their current book is organized as four separate documents arranged chronologically and linked by editorial commentary. Hillman and Quesnel open with Gournay's novel, the *Promenade*, which is followed by two essays on the woman question. The final piece, *The Apology for the Woman Writing*, is a personal defense of Gournay's lifestyle and feminist writings, both of which challenged early modern patriarchal attitudes and structures. Hillman and Quesnel's translations are quite readable while preserving Gournay's multi-layered, densely packed, yet deeply personal prose. They skillfully capture Gournay's ironic voice, especially in *The Ladies' Complaint*.

The Promenade of Monsieur de Montaigne, first published in 1594, falls under the category of *histoire tragique*, a “popular kind of romantic and sensational narrative, typically involving tangled erotic relations and invariably ending in disaster” (p. 21). *The Promenade* begins in ancient Persia where a beautiful princess, Alinda, is given in marriage to a Parthian prince by her father in order to end a long, savage war. Rather than submit to the unwanted marriage, Alinda elopes with a young nobleman. The lovers are shipwrecked on the shores of Thrace where a local lord falls in love with Alinda. The Thracian lord uses his sister to ensnare Alinda’s betrothed, Leontin. Leontin, “dupe of his own passions and egotism,” abandons Alinda (p. 23). Alinda cannot return home, for she betrayed her father and family; nor can she stay in Thrace in dishonor. She chooses a path though which she maintains pride, honor, and virtue: suicide. Leontin, upon learning of Alinda’s death, is sincerely remorseful. Unable to bear the guilt, he, too, kills himself. Alinda’s suicide allows her the final word (in a morbid twist of logic) in a man’s world.

Gournay manages to interweave the main story with numerous classical tales. According to Hillman and Quesnel, “Gournay’s most distinctive contributions bear on the movement of the narrative and on the representation of the characters” (p. 21). For example, Gournay draws on the tale of Dido and Aeneas to illustrate the “inconstancy of men” (p. 22) and the consequences for women. In the footnotes, Hillman and Quesnel provide helpful Latin translations and explanations of Gournay’s classical references. In fact, the footnotes are almost as interesting as Gournay’s narrative.

One of the more intriguing aspects found throughout the *Promenade* is a quiet conversation between Gournay and the deceased Montaigne. Gournay opens the novel with a “Dedicatory Epistle” to her adopted “Father” (p. 29) and continues with interruptions of the primary narrative in order to address Montaigne explicitly. “Now, father, in your *Essays*...,” writes Gournay, and then she models her defense of Paula and Melania on Montaigne’s defense of Plutarch and Seneca (p. 57). Hillman and Quesnel provide a context for these interruptions in their “Introduction.” The editors explore the Neo-platonic undertones of Gournay’s perceived father/daughter relationship with Montaigne. Neoplatonism transcends the accidents of gender and age and perhaps even death. Clearly, Gournay continues her relationship with Montaigne through her writing. The editors have done an excellent job of deconstructing the multiple layers of the *Promenade*, including Gournay’s relationship with Montaigne, as well as her own identity development through narrative fiction.

The Equality of Men and Women is an “explicitly feminist essay” and the essay for which Gournay is most renowned since it is included in a number of early modern anthologies (p. 69). Gournay writes, “If, therefore, women attain less often than men to the heights of excellence, it is a marvel that the lack of good education, indeed, the abundance of outright and blatantly bad education does not do worse and prevent them from doing so entirely” (p. 81). She then uses classical and church authorities to argue the case for the equality of men and women. Gournay enlists authorities such as Plato, Basil of Caesarea, Boccaccio, and Agrippa as well as female historical figures such as Mary Magdalene and Judith to make her argument. Hillman and Quesnel suggest that Gournay’s originality lies less in her defense of women than in “her aspiration to join [an intellectual community transcending gender] by dint of scholarly merit” (p. 70). Unfortunately for Gournay, her reading audience simply would not allow an old maid (as one of her many critics derisively characterized her) that opportunity (p. 13).

Hillman and Quesnel’s third selection, *The Ladies’ Complaint*, has been characterized as “an outburst of temper based on [the author’s] own bitter experience” (p. 97). Rather than dismissing Gournay’s temper, the editors suggest that an outburst can itself be an intentional literary form, and one that demands attention equal to a more abstract or deliberative essay. “The *Complaint* thereby emerges as a rhetorical ‘set piece,’ complementing the forceful but abstract ironies of the *Equality* with a satirical scorn appropriate to the actual behavior of men in contemporary society, especially of those pretenders to intellectual sophistication who concealed their personal inadequacy behind the mask of male superiority” (p. 97). Hillman and Quesnel find Gournay’s contempt well-justified given the patriarchal

strictures of her day and her own experiences in the spiteful, vindictive literary world. Her critics subjected Gournay to public ridicule and practical jokes. In one instance, she was tricked into writing an autobiography on the false understanding that King James I of England wanted to read about her. Upon learning of the joke, her response was to publish the piece anyway (p. 10).

The *Complaint* serves as a companion piece to the *Equality*. The *Equality* is deliberate and replete with academic references, playing by conventional rules, while the *Complaint* is an acerbic literary missive. Listen to the irony in her opening address as Gournay borrows the form of the Beatitudes: "Blessed art thou, Reader, if you are not of that sex to which one forbids everything of value, thereby depriving it of liberty..." (p. 101). She is especially scornful of those pretenders who are not any more intelligent or able than she but, because of male body parts, posture as though they are superior. Gournay is caught in a difficult situation. She covets the esteem of the reading public, the salon group, but she is disdainful of that same public for its male privileging. This predicament makes her language at times inflammatory, her bitterness apparent, and leaves her open to further mocking and disparagement. The final ambivalence is her place as Montaigne's "daughter;" she still needed male authority to provide her credibility.

For their last piece, Hillman and Quesnel chose Gournay's essay, *Apology for the Woman Writing*, first published in 1626. Hillman and Quesnel term the *Apology* an "autobiographical self-justification" or defense, invoked similarly to Plato's *Apology of Socrates* (p. 107). The essay is a response to public attacks motivated by contempt for her position as an independent woman with intellectual ambitions. Gournay suffered assaults on her management of family finances, personal relationships, and her writing. In this book-end to her life, Gournay interweaves literary and social concerns with her own self-identity, so much so that one critic concludes that Gournay's "major contribution to French literature may very well be the subtle art of self-portrait" (p. 108).

Gournay's voice in the *Apology* is anxious and insecure. She is disappointed and disillusioned by friends' betrayal (fair weather friends) and by a lack of appreciation and approbation by the reading public. Placing the *Apology* as the final piece in this collection works brilliantly. In their introduction to the *Apology*, Hillman and Quesnel return to Alinda's final speech before her suicide in the *Promenade*. In both Alinda's speech and the *Apology*, "there is...an uncanny similar mixture of tones: despair, self-righteousness, self-pity, anger, vindictiveness" (p. 109). Both women, despite virtue and intelligence, still end up as the victims. Hillman and Quesnel have well-chosen four pieces illustrative of a woman writer's struggle to create a space for herself in the early modern literary world.

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