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Anne of France, *Lessons For My Daughter*. Ed. and trans. by Sharon L. Jansen. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004. xiii + 105 pp. Notes, bibliography and Index. \$70.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 1843840162.

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In the last few years, a number of presses have committed themselves to making available neglected and formerly out-of-print primary texts by and about medieval and early modern women. Series like the University of Chicago Press's "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe" and Marquette University Press's "Women of the Reformation" have greatly expanded the resources available in English for the study of European women's history. Sharon Jansen's edited translation of Anne of France's *Lessons For My Daughter*, part of D. S. Brewer's "Library of Medieval Women" series, is an important addition to these sources and is particularly valuable as a text that illuminates women's political roles in Renaissance Europe, an era that is known for its numerous women rulers and regents.

Anne of France (1461-1522) was the daughter of Louis XI of France. When Louis died in 1483, he entrusted Anne with the care and education of her brother, the new king Charles VIII, who was then thirteen years old. Although Anne did not initially have the title of regent, she was the de facto ruler of France during the early years of Charles's reign (1483-1498). When Charles went off to invade Italy in 1494, he left Anne in charge as regent until his return. Anne wrote her *Lessons* for her daughter, Suzanne de Bourbon (1491-1521), after she had stepped down from her role as regent, probably in 1497 or 1498 when Suzanne was around seven or eight years old. The *Lessons* were first published between 1517 and 1521 and reprinted twice in the 1530s.

Although Anne was one of the most powerful women of her era, until recently she has received very little scholarly attention. Sharon Jansen's earlier book, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe*, [1] together with Pauline Matarasso's *Queen's Mate: Three Women of Power in France on the Eve of the Renaissance* [2] have helped to remedy this gap. Jansen's earlier book identified Anne as a central figure within an alternative genealogy of the ruling families of early modern Europe which placed "women on top" (p. 5). In a similar fashion, Jansen places Anne's *Letters* in a tradition of women's writing that extends back to Christine de Pizan, who wrote a century before her. Anne's mother had given her a copy of Christine's *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, a possible model for Anne's book, and Anne's own *Lessons* were read by the powerful women that followed her, including Marguerite of Angoulême, author of the *Heptameron* and sister of Francis I of France (her own daughter Jeanne d'Albret became ruler of Navarre and mother to Henry IV), to whom the third edition of the book was dedicated in 1535. Anne's *Lessons* have traditionally been viewed by scholars as one of a number of conduct books for women produced during the Renaissance. Jansen, however, offers an alternative reading this work, as a political text. She argues that Anne modeled her *Lessons* on guides for princes (and occasionally princesses), including the instructions written by her forebear Louis IX (1214-1270) to his son and daughter and *The Rosetree Wars* that her father had drawn up for her brother Charles. Jansen points out, for example, that Anne's *Lessons* include the same number of sections--thirty-three--as Louis IX had composed for his son. Just as the *The Rosetree Wars* had outlined the qualities of an ideal king, Anne's *Lessons* offer a model of the ideal princess.

At first glance, the *Lessons* would seem to have no clear organizing principle, but Jansen's introduction helps us to see that Anne's advice follows the stages of the female life cycle, from daughter to wife to widow. Anne begins by advising her daughter on matters concerning religion and morality. She

recommends a balanced diet of spiritual and philosophical reading, and urges Suzanne to develop those virtues that are of particular importance for women: chastity, humility, patience, courtesy, and modesty. With regard to the latter, Anne advises her daughter to dress neatly and according to her rank, but warns her not to imitate “those women who think they are very fashionable when their clothing is low-cut and very tight” (p. 37). Such women not only commit the sin of vanity, they also endanger their health: They “dress themselves so scantily in winter that they are freezing with cold” and as a result “they endure many grievous illnesses, and many even die” (p. 37). (Anne’s warning here may seem a bit over the top, but many women reading this today can probably recall receiving similar advice from their own mothers!). Anne also warns her daughter about the dangers of men who will resort to all sorts of tricks to try to compromise her honor.

Anne goes on to outline the duties of a noble wife and mother. Her advice includes the conventional wisdom about obeying her husband and seeing to the education of her children: Anne points out that daughters especially “are a heavy responsibility.” But her main purpose in this section of the *Lessons* is to describe the model of a noblewoman which Suzanne should exemplify: “Noblewomen are, and should be, a mirror, a pattern, and an example for others in all things” (p. 49). The ideal noblewoman must be virtuous, diplomatic, and prudent. While Anne acknowledges the common view of silence as a feminine virtue, the ability to speak well is an asset to a noblewoman who must entertain guests and foreign visitors. She must also be careful to keep the secrets of those who confide in her, and not to reveal to others matters which might affect her honor. Here Anne may well have been influenced by her reading of Christine de Pizan who more directly refuted stereotypes about women’s loquacity and inability to keep secrets. A noblewoman must also maintain the proper distinctions of rank and status. Anne advises Suzanne to always dress more richly than the other women in her entourage, “show them that you are their mistress not only in your bearing, manner, and demeanor, but also in your headdress, robes and other clothing” (p. 57). In the brief section on widowhood, Anne’s advice focuses on how to negotiate the difficulties of women wielding power independently, advice clearly informed by her own life experience: “When it comes to the government of their lands and affairs, [widowed women] must depend only on themselves; when it comes to sovereignty, they must not cede power to anyone” (p. 64).

In reading the *Lessons*, one is struck by the contradictory nature of Anne’s advice. On the one hand, she upholds conventional ideas about women during this period, emphasizing the virtues of chastity, silence, and obedience. But despite occasional references to the weakness of women, her advice subtly and consistently undermines negative stereotypes about women. For example, her warning to her daughter to exercise complete control over her bodily movements because of women’s “weak female nature” (p. 38) is immediately followed by a section describing the treachery of men, who are lustful, weak willed, and fickle—qualities that were normally associated with *women*. Women must take care to maintain the appearance of virtue not so much because they are weak, but for the practical reason that it is essential to their honor and reputation.

In her very useful “Interpretive Essay” at the end of the book, Jansen notes the difficulty of penetrating Anne’s “opacity” (p. 69) due in part to her own efforts at self-concealment, but also because Anne’s biographers, from the fifteenth century to the present, have been unable to escape stereotypes about powerful women. Jansen also compares Anne’s *Lessons* to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. Like Machiavelli, Anne presents a pragmatic guidebook for “the Princess” that accepts the status quo but offers strategies for using it for her own purposes. She also advises Suzanne of the wisdom of concealment and emphasizes the importance of *appearing* to be virtuous, much like Machiavelli does. And Jansen points out that Machiavelli accepted the idea of a female ruler, which is not too surprising considering how many of them there actually were in Renaissance Italy. The comparison is intriguing; however, one is left wondering about the historical significance of the similarities. Why the turn to pragmatism, and what was Anne’s role in this shift? Is it significant that Anne came *before* Machiavelli? Another parallel,

roughly contemporary with Machiavelli, that came to my mind is with St. Teresa of Avila. Allison Weber has shown how Teresa used images of humility and feminine weakness to help legitimize her unorthodox activities.^[3] While Teresa may not have been familiar with Anne's *Lessons*, their similar strategies of "masking" and "duplicity" (a quality viewed by contemporaries as particularly feminine) raise questions about the differing meanings of these for women and men.

Anne of France's *Letters* are essential reading for anyone interested in the political power of women in early modern Europe. They offered a model to noblewomen in the generations that followed, at least some of whom read this work, for how to navigate the contradictions between politics and gender expectations. However, one is left wondering, considering the fact that so few of the many of the female regents who came after her were able to do so successfully, just how useful *was* her advice?

NOTES

[1] Sharon Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[2] Pauline Matarasso, *Queen's Mate: Three Women of Power in France on the Eve of the Renaissance* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2001).

[3] Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

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