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Response to **Katharine J. Hamerton's review** of **Faith E. Beasley**, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Edited by Allyson Poska and Abby Zanger. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006. xii + 345 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$94.95 U.S. ISBN 0-7546-5354-4.

Response by Faith Beasley, Dartmouth College.

H-France has invited me to respond to Katharine Hamerton's review of my book, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*. I appreciate her effort to engage my work in such depth. Although her summary and overall assessment of my work are accurate, the critiques of my project embedded in the center of her review reveal in my view an insufficient appreciation of the fundamental differences between the seventeenth and eighteenth-century literary field, and of the evolving gender dynamic at the heart of both the seventeenth and eighteenth-century literary landscapes. These critiques are doubtlessly rooted in the fact that she is primarily a scholar of the eighteenth century and a historian. My perspective is one of a seventeenth-century specialist of literature and language. I am writing what one could term an analysis of the institution of literature by studying it discursively, that is, through language. I specifically try to avoid generalizations and false syntheses through my close readings of specific case studies. Simply put, Hamerton's primary criticism of my work focuses on arguments that I did not intend to make and strategies that I did not desire to use in *Mastering Memory*.

Many of the critiques Hamerton makes derive from a difference in opinion regarding precisely what I was trying to examine in my study. The purpose of my book is not to explore the historical legacy of the seventeenth-century French salon as a social institution, nor is my "entire book premised on the argument that women's literary role in the eighteenth-century salons was radically less important and independent than it had been." Indeed, that premise has little relevance to my study, the purpose of which is to investigate the seventeenth-century institution of the salon as a determining force on the literary milieu of what would eventually become France's "classical literary canon." No historian or literature specialist would disagree that when late nineteenth-century scholars, critics, and pedagogues were called upon to select a canon of literary works most representative of France's literary achievement, the texts they chose were 1) primarily from the seventeenth century, and 2) authored by men. This canon, once in place, became so intricately intertwined with the construction of the French national identity that even at the turn of the twenty-first century, students of French literature who were asked to name the "greatest works" of the French tradition would list Corneille, Racine, Molière, and Boileau—omitting their influential female contemporaries, Scudéry and Lafayette. The goal of my project was to fathom why this would have been the case, especially given the degree to which this projection is at odds with the vision of the seventeenth-century literary landscape defined by late twentieth-century specialists of women's and gender studies, historians and literary critics such as Carolyn Lougee, Natalie Zemon Davis, Joan DeJean, Madelyn Gutwirth, Donna Stanton, Nancy K. Miller, Erica Harth, and Gabrielle Verdier, to name just a few.

Hamerton's critique of my view of the eighteenth-century salon, and of my supposed reliance on Elena Russo's interpretation of it, curiously fails to include pivotal scholarship about the eighteenth-century salon in this discussion—namely Dena Goodman's corroborating scholarship on the eighteenth-century republic of letters or the work of Alain Viala, who straddles the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By contrast, Hamerton's claim that Antoine Lilti's very recent work now offers the definitive "accepted"

view of women's roles in the eighteenth-century salon and the influence of the salon in general would seem precipitous. Lilti's book, which appeared only a few months before mine and with which I was unable to construct a dialogue given that my own book was already in press, is only now beginning to become part of the discussion.^[1] Certainly in seventeenth-century studies there is no consensus that Lilti or indeed anyone else has put any questions to rest, as Hamerton implies, primarily because few scholars have focused on the seventeenth-century salons first before turning to the institution's eighteenth-century manifestations. In *Mastering Memory* I argued that when one looks first at the seventeenth, and then at the eighteenth-century salon, one sees fundamental differences in the way women participated in literary and philosophical endeavors and were viewed by their peers. Chapelain and Scudéry or La Fontaine and La Sablière do not find their equivalents in Graffigny and Voltaire or d'Épinay and Rousseau, for example, nor do these pairs have similar interactions in the salons of their respective periods. Women such as Lambert, Graffigny, d'Épinay, and later Genlis, among others, themselves lamented the changes they perceived in women's influence and the roles they were assigned by their contemporaries, especially with respect to intellectual activities.

Despite Hamerton's claims to the contrary, I do not categorically state that 1700 marked an abrupt shift in the cultural history of the salon. Rather, my discussion of the shift that occurred between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is based on a figure who straddled both: Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat-de-Courcelles, marquise de Lambert (1647-1753). Relying on the works that Lambert published during the 1720s, I trace how women's roles were being reformulated, particularly with respect to their cultural and literary participation in the intellectual realm, demonstrating how Lambert's observations can be substantiated by the gradual elimination of women writers, most of whom were active *salonnières*, from literary anthologies throughout the eighteenth century. In stating this observation, I am in no way trying to make a definitive claim about the evolution of the eighteenth-century salon, although there is ample evidence to support my argument that women's influence on the evolution of literature in the salons changes from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. Women's development of the novel in the seventeenth-century does not have its equivalent in the eighteenth.

Finally Hamerton finds "lacunae" in my bibliography, something that most scholars would agree is virtually unavoidable when writing a book of any kind, let alone one that spans more than four centuries. In an effort to incorporate an array of primary and secondary sources, it was impossible to cite everything, especially when one is working with a number of different disciplines as I was. I do not agree with Hamerton, however, that there are any major lacunae that would be considered "significant limitations."^[2] In my research over the course of the ten years that I was writing *Mastering Memory*, I was very careful to consult the work of all the major scholars with the sole exception, of course, of works that appeared after my own work was already in press. I intentionally adopted the strategy of doing close readings of case studies as opposed to constructing a vast and most likely oversimplified version of four centuries of intellectual history. I would add that my bibliography consists of the works I found the most relevant and useful, but certainly does not include everything I read for this project.

I am gratified that Hamerton ends her review stating that my work "points towards a fruitful interdisciplinary partnership of historical, literary and feminist studies" and that my "argument will surely inspire...further research." That was precisely my hope for this book.

NOTES

[1] It is interesting to note that Lilti's article, "La Femme du Monde est-elle une intellectuelle" which appeared in 2005, again too late for me to incorporate it into my book, makes the same point that I do:

the eighteenth-century *salonnière* embraced a subordinate role. This is the only point that I emphasize with respect to the eighteenth century salon, the focus of my study being on the seventeenth-century manifestation of the salon, in which women are clearly not subordinate. [2] I wonder if perhaps Hamerton was referring to her own dissertation, which I did not consult. I did limit myself to critical works that had been published.

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