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Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de Lafayette, *Zayde: A Spanish Romance*. Edited and translated by Nicholas D. Paige. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe Series. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. xxi. + 210 pp. Bibliography and index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-46851-8; \$18.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-226-46852-6.

Review by Christie Sample Wilson, St. Edward's University.

In his recent translation of *Zayde: A Spanish Romance*, Nicholas Paige offers the modern reader a glimpse into the French romantic tradition of the late seventeenth century. This romance is both “the last great French romance” and an attempt to redefine the genre (p. 13). In this tale of love found and love lost, the comtesse de Lafayette draws on the long tradition of French romance. She takes her readers on a tour, familiar to a seventeenth century audience, of the Mediterranean in stories that are full of intrigue, misunderstanding, heroism, and courage. At the same time, she presents the characters in a new way for her readers. Rather than focus on the concrete obstacles to love as was tradition among romance writers, Lafayette turns to the interior lives of her characters, concentrating instead on their inner struggles. The story evolves in a succession of personal tales recounted by each of the main characters about the events in their lives that led them to their current situation. As they tell their own stories of romance and romantic frustration, the characters reveal their own perspective and interpretation of events, thereby providing a critique of the form of the romance novel as it was passing out of vogue in favor of more psychological novels at the end of the seventeenth century.

The editor's introduction clearly and succinctly positions the novel within the context of the development of the genre of romance novels, and its demise, which was imminent at the time of the writing of *Zayde*. Lafayette's work, published pseudonymously, was part of a larger effort to reinvigorate the romance novel. This literary form was losing its central place as it was increasingly maligned as suitable reading primarily for women, who were considered idle and naïve readers. Efforts to revive and remake the genre included the work not only of the comtesse de Lafayette, but also that of Madeleine de Scudéry and Marie-Catherine Desjardins, known as Madame de Villedieu. In her effort to help the process of reinvigoration, Lafayette's novel is much shorter than the traditional romance novel and is simpler in terms of the number of characters, main and incidental, as well as the intricacy of their respective tales.

Additionally, this novel presents a critique of the form of the romance novel. As a critique of the genre, Lafayette's characters act as they were expected to act in a romance novel, with the expected series of infatuations, broken hearts, and interventions of supernatural elements such as prophecies. However, the nature of the romantic entanglements and disappointments of the characters in *Zayde* were focused on the internal struggles and insecurities rather than the role of external obstacles and fate. Though simplified by the standards of the seventeenth century, for the modern reader the tale is complex. The novel is tightly written in comparison to contemporary works. The typical romance was characterized by a dizzying pace of action that was explained and contextualized through a subsequent series of flashbacks. By contrast, Lafayette dramatically limits the amount of action in her tale. Combined with a relatively small number of incidental characters, her story is streamlined and proceeds at a much slower pace.

The story of *Zayde* includes love and intrigue, along with courage and heroism. The novel presents the events in the romantic lives of three main characters, Consalve, Alphonse, and Zayde, along with those

of two related characters, Felime and Alamir. Each has loved and been loved, yet was ultimately frustrated by the object of affection, or, more precisely, by their own insecurities, jealousies, or misunderstandings that resulted from their infatuation. Consalve and Alphonse find refuge from their pasts in a deserted stretch of the Spanish coast in early tenth-century Leon. Each has escaped a failed love affair and sought isolation and anonymity. Having been thrown together through happenstance, the two men find two women who have washed ashore after a shipwreck, Zayde and Felime. These women are beautiful, particularly Zayde, and mysterious. The women do not speak either Spanish or Arabic, which leaves them unable to communicate with their rescuers. Though Consalve has sworn off of any further loves, he falls in love with the beautiful Zayde, who, he is certain, pines after another love. The plot continues and becomes ever more complicated as the various characters recount their stories, become separated, and rediscover one another, finally ending with a rather hurried and happy resolution for Consalve and Zayde.

This romance was written by a woman for a largely female audience in a genre increasingly identified and demeaned as feminine in the late seventeenth century; as such, it is a valuable contribution to this series' commitment to the tradition of the "other voice". The series introduction by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr. succinctly explains the tradition of the other voice. This is the voice that challenged the "first voice" of educated men, particularly in the early modern period. The other voice raised questions that confronted the long held cultural assumptions about women in Western culture.

The editors highlight four problems addressed collectively by the authors of the titles in this series: "the problem of chastity, the problem of power, the problem of speech, and the problem of knowledge" (p. xxiii). Both Lafayette and the story of *Zayde* represent an invocation against the growing prejudice toward the other voice. Lafayette herself represented a challenge to the reigning expectations that women would refrain from excessive speech, be unable to exercise significant power, or be well educated. As a member of the French aristocracy, Comtesse de Lafayette was both well educated and powerful. She had power through her position in the traditional aristocracy, as well as a result of her connections with the court of Louis XIV. She also had some independence by virtue of the fact that she was not fully integrated into the increasingly complex and regimented life of the court.

Lafayette herself had risen to the traditional aristocracy due to the advantageous marriages of both her mother and herself. Marie-Madeleine became the comtesse de Lafayette and began to act accordingly, moving to her husband's estate, while maintaining her ties to Paris and its literary culture. In time she took the unusual step of remaining in Paris, even when the comte de Lafayette returned to the ancestral home. Here she was an active participant in the salon culture of the mid-seventeenth century, where she was recognized as a leading figure. It was in this environment where she wrote both *Zayde* and her more celebrated novel, the *Princess of Clèves*. As a woman living independently and having such a public life, Lafayette represented a challenge to all of the problems identified by the volume editors in their introduction. The aristocratic Lafayette, who served as maid of honor to the queen mother and whose close friend wed the dauphin, did not represent a rebellion against all of the social norms of her age. Her life and accomplishments do, however, shed light on the ways in which women, restricted by a significant and sometimes rigid set of social expectations, could create pathways to power and knowledge.

Both the life of Lafayette and those of her characters represent subtle challenges to the expectations of the seventeenth century in the tradition of the other voice. The very publication of the novel, at once traditional and innovative, was an invocation against the growing prejudice against the romance novel as a form that was quintessentially feminine, and, therefore, less substantive and serious than the emerging realism, a genre identified with male characteristics.

With regard to the problems identified by the series editors, Lafayette and her feminine characters represent women such as herself who challenge the conventional ideas of how proper women protected

their reputation for chastity and reveal ways in which women, excluded from traditional pathways to power, managed to exert significant influence over people and events through their cunning, beauty, and virtue. The female characters in *Zayde* also behave in ways that are at once socially correct and powerful. *Zayde* and Felime were not passive in their relationships with their loves or others who would control them. These women variously gained and disavowed the affections of men who were aristocratic and well placed to provide security and social status to their loves. The women showed themselves willing and able to manipulate a complex variety of circumstances and expectations in order to achieve the desirable end of their own choosing, whether they sought true affection or social prestige.

For the historian this translation offers some interesting possibilities for teaching about both the issues surrounding the tradition of the other voice as well as the intricacies of the evolving court life under Louis XIV. The stories of Consalve and Alphonse both have as central elements the delicate and changing relationship between the monarchy and the leading aristocrats of the realm. Traditional historiography has long grappled with the question of the relationship between king and aristocracy during the reign of Louis XIV, and the past twenty years have seen an outpouring of publications that offer increasingly nuanced analyses of the balance of power and patterns of dependence and domination between the crown and aristocracy. The stories of these characters in the novel give a sense of the relationship of the aristocracy, particularly the traditional sword nobility, with the monarchy.

The novel, while set in a very different time and place, was written by a woman who in many ways represented the past, in terms of her literary genre as well as her social position. The first part *Zayde* was published in 1670 and was set in the princely courts of Spain at a time when the court in her own home was transformed under the personal rule of Louis XIV. In the experiences of Consalve in particular, Lafayette provides glimpses into the complex relationships of the court. These include those between the king and the heir to the throne, and those between the pretenders to power, in the case of this tale, the heir to the throne and the heir to one of the powerful counts of Castile. Finally, it gives insight into the power that the queen herself could exercise. Though fictional, the interactions and considerations of these characters highlight the collaborative nature of ruling and the degree to which the monarch relied on the cooperation of his nobles, both at court and in battle, even in a monarchy with pretensions to absolutism.

Lafayette herself was an example of the continued power of the traditional aristocracy. She was part of the sword nobility through her marriage to the comte, but was not fully integrated into the life of the court. Her social position and literary career represented the continuation of a degree independence from the court at a time when Louis XIV was trying to increase his control over the nobility in a variety of ways.

The efforts of Paige to produce a translation of this uncommon, yet important, novel provide another good option for teaching in a form that is accessible to the advanced undergraduate. The novel will certainly be useful in courses on women's history. It can also serve as an introduction to the principles and intricacies of life at court in the seventeenth century. While it does not provide specific information, in a general course it could well serve to introduce students to the intricate power relationships between men and women as well as between monarchy and aristocracy in a format that is accessible and entertaining. For the student who needs to understand the general principles of the early modern French state without being overwhelmed by the intricacies of the relationships between king and noble, *Zayde* provides an intriguing window into this world of power and intrigue.

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