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Rebecca M. Wilkin, *Women, Imagination, and the Search for Truth in Early Modern France*. Hampshire, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2008. x +253 pp. Eleven b & w illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. £55.00, on-line £49.00 (hb). ISBN: 978-0-7546-6138-2.

Review by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Occidental College and University of California, Los Angeles.

Rebecca M. Wilkin has made a substantially-evidenced clarion call for more studies of the impact of the sixteenth-century discourse on women's nature and roles on seventeenth-century insights on gender bias in scholarship and in the sciences. Thus, Wilkin makes a particularly important contribution to Ashgate's series on "Women and Gender in the Early Modern World," a series that evaluates concepts of gender as well as the experiences of early modern women. Her title *Women, Imagination, and the Search for Truth in Early Modern France* highlights the scholarly fictions concerning women as well as women's involvement in humanistic and scientific inquiry. Her in-depth analysis of texts and their influences shows sophistication in intellectual history, history of science, literary criticism, and history of philosophy. Overall the book shows sixteenth-century awareness of "epistemological instability" leading to a "systematic reflection on the need for epistemological reform" (p. 5), that is, the scientific curricula claiming to supersede the scholastic and humanist curricula, as well as the issue of who is to be included as seekers of truth.

Rebecca M. Wilkin introduces her work as differing from previous scholarship that has emphasized sexist ideology; instead she focuses on "contradictory representations of women" (p. 1). Her important dethroning of MacLean's *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (1980) by juxtaposing characterization of women in genres beyond university curricula does of course have many precedents derived ultimately from the texts of "la querelle des femmes." [1] Second-wave feminist historical scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s was very interested in exposing the negative stereotyping of women and the societal restrictions on their productivity.

In her Introduction, Wilkin emphasizes the contribution of skepticism to Descartes's argument for the intellectual equality of women and men (in his French *Discours* for female as well as male readers, but not in his Latin *Meditationes*). Wilkin's emphasis on the Renaissance relationship between "pro(to)feminist discourse and sceptical or fideist attitudes toward knowledge" (p. 225) is very important but not unprecedented. In "The Image of God in Man—is Woman Included?," I began by asking whether Agrippa von Nettesheim's argument of 1529 that the distinction of sex is only in bodily parts, not in soul or mind, might be the dominant Western interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 (as in the mainstream Augustinian tradition) rather than the viewpoint of a skeptic showing that "reason can prove anything, no matter how absurd." [2] I strongly commend Wilkin for viewing the sixteenth-century historical and comparative discussions of nature vs. cultural nurture as an important contribution to scientific inquiry. Through texts by Marie de Gournay and Elizabeth of Bohemia, Wilkin illustrates that the participation of women played a role in shaking up gender biases in scholarly fields and in the sciences.

Wilkin's methodology involves five chapters, each focusing on one or two authors who contributed to defining a broad intellectual trend. In succession, the chapters are "Common Sense: Johann Weyer and the Psychology of Witchcraft," "The Touchstone of Truth: Jean Bodin's Torturous Hermeneutics," "*Masle* Morale in the Body Politic: Guillaume du Vair and André du Laurens," "The Suspension of Difference: Michel de Montaigne's Lame Lovers," and "Even Women': Cartesian Rationalism Reconsidered." Without any change in content of the last two chapters, she might have added to the chapter titles the name Marie de Gournay (with Montaigne) and Elizabeth of Bohemia (with Descartes). Wilkin provides eleven book illustrations which she analyzes to explore the role of imagination in representation (Thevet, L'Estoile), as well as to document the search for anatomical evidence (Vesalius, du Laurens); while there are images of male authors (Weyer, Aristotle), there are none of women authors. I'd recommend the 1610 portrait of Marie de Gournay.

Wilkin's chapter one makes a subtle analysis of Johan Weyer's *De preaestigiis daemonum* in the context of the literature on demonology, heresy, witchcraft, and the secrets of women. As denying demons would be heresy and Weyer initiated the naturalistic explanation of alleged witches as melancholiacs, I see less inconsistency in Weyer's mention of demonic distortion of human perception (pp. 8, 68). Wilkin appropriately applies "reading" (as in Luther's reformation) to Weyer's seeing for himself the sense-based evidence and his lifting up the status of observation and common sense for attaining knowledge.[3] She praises Weyer for his restraint from torture, and emphasizes that the French perceived Weyer's writing as "Protestant," in that it undermines "demonic possession" and consequently Catholic "exorcism."

Wilkin in chapter two focuses on Jean Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers*, which contained a refutation of Weyer. Wilkin discusses Montaigne's responses to the two works in chapter four, and is correct in viewing Weyer as important for Montaigne's discrediting of Bodin's demonology.[4] Wilkin emphasizes Ginevera Condi Odorisio's interpretation of the power of the husband over the wife in Bodin's *La République*[5] as basic to Bodin's gender construction of nature as God's wife and of the atheism of female insubordination (pp. 71, 74). Particularly interesting is the exploration of the impact of Sextus Empiricus on Bodin (pp. 69-71) and Wilkin's imagining the perspective of Descartes on the weakness of Bodin's overall hermeneutics—requiring a prophet-magistrate to understand God's authority (pp. 91-92). The chapter concludes that despite different epistemologies, both Weyer and Bodin exclude women from the search for truth.

Wilkin in her third chapter emphasizes the adjective *masle* (masculine) in Guillaume du Vair's description of Stoic *vertu* (virtue)—the determination of reason to will the control of the passions. She interprets the neo-Stoic ethic as best served by "a healthy male body, a body one might readily glimpse in a battlefield" (p. 126). However, the peace established by Henry IV's Edict of Nantes (1598) would eschew the warrior ethic, and the analogies she analyzes in *La Constance et consolation* (1595) concerning feminine truth requiring male eloquence derive ultimately from the common medieval and early modern use of "masculine" and "feminine" as a shortcut for hierarchical distinctions as in the analogical discussion of the soul in both men and women into an upper (called "masculine") part and a lower (called "feminine") part. The authors in *Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century France* give abundant evidence of fashion for feminization as in Francis I after the end of the Italian wars, the playing with concepts of hermaphroditism, and the problematization of masculinity.[5] Likewise from the viewpoint of Seneca's letters to women, Stoic ideals for women included *masle* virtue, and the famous tale from Livy of Lucretia's suicide might inspire a *honnête femme* to fulfil Stoic virtue. Stoicism does support Wilkin's recognition that for Du Vair, masculine traits are a product of the will. Whereas Wilkin juxtaposes Du Vair with medical doctor and neo-Stoic Du Laurens, I find Du Vair more similar to Du Laurens in the assertion of autonomy of the will of women and men to choose strength (called "masculinity") rather than weakness (called "femininity"). For Wilkin, Du Laurens views the mind as using the body for its autonomous purposes, and thus Du Laurens forshadows "Descartes's claim that the mind and body are distinct substances" (p. 139).

Wilkin's chapter four analyses twelve essays of Montaigne and a few short works of Marie de Gournay. In succession, she discusses "fideism versus scepticism," "Montaigne's effeminate ethics," "imagining sex change sceptically," "ourselves, *par deça*: the Amazons," and "from equipollence to equality: Marie de Gournay." In attempting the first sustained argument for the relationship of scepticism and the woman question, Wilkin views Marie de Gournay's "De l'égalité des hommes et des femmes," as derived from a "flattening of gender hierarchy and the suspension of gender difference, both privileged expressions of Montaigne's scepticism" (p. 144). Therein is the precedent for Descartes. Wilkin might have discussed the scholarship claiming Gournay's possible impact on Montaigne's post-1588 additions.[7]

Very relevant throughout the book is Wilkin's discussion of Sextus's tenth mode of opposition concerning the variety of customs and beliefs among peoples. She does not explore Bodin's *De la république* or *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* for the many examples of the variety of cultures which entered the writings of authors Montaigne and Pierre Charron. While Montaigne takes a sceptical conclusion from his examples of relativity of gender categories as in resemblance of Amazonian matriarchy to patriarchy (pp. 151, 173-74), Marie de Gournay's applies the "suspension of gender difference to make a case for women's equality with men" (p. 177).

Wilkin is to be commended for placing Descartes in the context of late Renaissance French thought encompassing medical and scientific treatises, moral and political treatises, and literary texts. During the French religious wars, authors were responding to many challenges to the commonly agreed truths (p. 1) and sought a foundation in the Stoic epistemology of seeds of virtue and knowledge (pp. 98-99, 206).[8] The Ciceronian Stoic formulation asserting *recta ratio* (right reason) in women and men contrasts with the Aristotelian limitation of full deliberative reason only to men and is a major source undermining Aristotelian misogyny[9]; Wilkin perceptively emphasizes the impact of Stoic epistemology on Descartes's alleged scepticism.

Wilkin emphasizes Descartes's opening of scientific inquiry to actual women, arguing constructively with the theses of Carolyn Merchant, Genevieve Lloyd and Erica Harth (pp. 3-4, 225). Distinguishing herself from their critics Michael Ruse and Alan Soble, Wilkin clarifies: "I have attempted to model a methodology in which gender provides the key to unlocking complex and highly individual epistemological and ethical stances" (p. 225). Wilkin's assessment of Elizabeth of Bohemia's impact on Descartes advances upon Erica Harth who showed Elizabeth of Bourbon influencing Descartes's *Les passions de l'ame*, and Jacqueline Broad who showed that the writings of Elizabeth of Bohemia, Margaret Cavendish, and other women scientists explicated more soul-body interaction than in Descartes's dualism.[10]

Wilkin argues that Descartes "legitimated women's full participation in the search for truth" and "was the first to provide the philosophical justification for the reform of institutions that produced and maintained inequality between men and women." (p. 188). One might qualify that argument in the context of medieval and Renaissance women's writing on educational reform and of Plato's institutions for women guardians and women philosopher-kings in his theoretical *Republic*, and in Wilkin's recognition that Descartes like the other male authors she analyzes did not take Gournay's position "that custom must change to reflect the equality of women and men" (p. 214). Wilkin's analysis of the writings of Gournay and Elizabeth of Bohemia illustrates the gender-bending impact on seventeenth-century thought of respectively a woman humanist and a woman scientist.

Wilkin's primary and secondary source bibliography is extensive and very helpful for those studying France of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have followed several of her leads to recent important articles and books. Subsequent works to consider are Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400-1700* (2009) and a historiographical debate on feminist historiography of science in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2008).[11]

NOTES

[1] *Half Humankind: Contexts and Text of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). Jean Brink, Allison Coudert, Maryanne Horowitz, ed., *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) and Brink, Coudert, and Horowitz, ed., *Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. (Kirksville, Missouri: The Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989); note in the titles the intended contrast of humor vs. outrage.

[2] Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "The Image of God in Man—Is Woman Included?, *Harvard Theological Review* 72, 3-4 (May-Dec., 1979), 175-206, quotation p. 177.

[3] An important example she gives is Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, trans., John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

[4] Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Drogue médicinale ou vieux conte: l'histoire et la justice chez Montaigne, Bodin et saint Augustin, *Montaigne et l'histoire*, ed., Claude G. Dubois (Bordeaux: Université de Bordeaux Press, 1991); "Doubts about 'Witches' and 'Magicians' in Reginald Scot and Gabriel Naudé," *History has Many Voices*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2003), 7-22.

[5] Ginevra Conti Odorisio, *Famiglia e Stato nella République di Jean Bodin*. (Torino: G. Giappichelli, 1993).

[6] *Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. Philip Ford and Paul White (Cambridge, England: Cambridge French Colloquia, 2006).

[7] Maryanne Cline Horowitz "Marie de Gournay, Editor of the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne: A Case-Study in Mentor-Protégé Friendship," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17 (Fall 1986), 271-284, and "French Free-Thinkers in the First Decades of the Edict of Nantes," *Early Modern Skepticism and the Origins of Toleration*, ed. Alan Levine (Lanham, Maryland and Oxford: Lexington Books, 1999), 77-79, 91-92.

[8] Maryanne Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) which culminates with neo-Stoicism of Du Vair and Lipsius, Bodin, Montaigne, and Charron.

[9] Horowitz, *Seeds*, p. 13.

[10] Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 64-78. Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[11] Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Brian Vickers, "Francis Bacon, Feminist Historiography, and Dominion of Nature," Katharine Park "Response to Brian Vickers, 'Francis Bacon, Feminist Historiography, and the Dominion of Nature,'" and Carolyn Merchant, "Secrets of Nature: The Bacon Debates Revisited," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, 1 (January 2008), pp. 117-162.

Maryanne Cline Horowitz
Occidental College and University of California, Los Angeles.
horowitz@oxy.edu

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