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Florence Lotterie, *Le Genre des Lumières: Femme et philosophe au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013. 336 pp. Bibliography and index of names. \$90.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-28124-1025-3.

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Book V of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile*, which proposed the striking model of Sophie's feminine alterity, remains a touchstone for scholars of women and gender in eighteenth-century France. In the past two decades, however, historians have moved well beyond Rousseau in their exploration of the gendered history of the Enlightenment, scouring sources and sites that range from fashion magazines and salons to colonial treatises and pornographic literature. Drawing on the new social history of ideas in the 1970s and inspired by engagement with Jürgen Habermas's model of the "public sphere" from the late 1980s, gender historians have continued to expand their field of inquiry.[1] Florence Lotterie reminds us, however, that scholars still have much to learn about how philosophy itself was gendered in the eighteenth century. She argues that the figure of the female philosopher stood at the center of both eighteenth-century fears and fantasies about the difference between the sexes and new definitions of philosophy itself.

Florence Lotterie, professor of eighteenth-century French literature at the University of Paris VII Denis Diderot, is an especially learned guide to the gendered "mind of the Enlightenment" and the creation of the new eighteenth-century category of the "femme philosophe." The editor of numerous critical editions of key eighteenth-century texts, including *Thérèse philosophe* and Diderot's *La religieuse* (both particularly relevant for this study), she is a specialist on both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Germaine de Staël and has authored two major monographs, *Littérature et sensibilité* (1998) and *Progrès et perfectibilité, un dilemme des Lumières françaises (1755-1814)*, as well as dozens of scholarly articles and reviews.[2] Lotterie's keen attention to texts and contexts and her command of the broad arc of eighteenth-century literary production considerably enrich her analysis.

Lotterie's study begins with two puzzles. First, given the monumental seventeenth-century Cartesian insight that "the mind has no sex," and Poulain de la Barre's conceptual breakthrough toward a vision of women's potential intellectual equality with men, why did so many eighteenth-century men and women embrace the belief that women's sensibility trumped their capacity for reason? Second, after the removal of philosophy in the eighteenth century from the exclusively male world of colleges and universities, the move from writing in Latin to the vernacular, and the active participation of amateurs in scientific and scholarly pursuits, why didn't more women benefit from these cultural changes? Why, in short, weren't there more *Émilie du Châtelets* who practiced at the cutting edge of science and philosophy and more men like Voltaire who appreciated the capacity of the female intellect?

Lotterie answers these questions by tracing the history of "la femme qui pense" from the Cartesians of the late seventeenth century to the medical doctors of the early nineteenth century. She contrasts the "*philosophe femme*" (the philosophical woman) with a newly constructed category that flourished in eighteenth-century literature, the "*femme philosophe*." The figure of the "*femme philosophe*," Lotterie argues, was a thoroughly paradoxical character, which permitted men who were in the process of reckoning with the radical new model of *le philosophe*—a new kind of socially and morally engaged

intellectual that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century—to process their ambivalent fantasies about sexual difference. Imagining the “*femme philosophe*” enabled men to fantasize both about their longing for harmony between learned men and women and their fears of social confusion and moral peril when women entered the world of knowledge production.

Instead of offering a linear narrative, Lotterie explores a series of “moments” that reveal the frontiers and tensions between male and female philosophers, between the rational mind and the sensual body, and the cultural negotiation over conditions of access to the restricted terrain of philosophy. Lotterie’s episodic approach may leave some readers wondering why she privileges particular texts over others in her analysis, or questioning why she sometimes jumps from early to late eighteenth-century works, but the non-linear form of her argument supports her project in two key ways. First, rather than attempting a comprehensive overview of the gendering of the Enlightenment, she seeks to explore the variety of imaginative scenarios available to eighteenth century men and women as they considered what might happen when women were added to the practice of philosophy. Secondly, she is interested in arguing for continuity in the rhetoric of the “*femme philosophe*” across the eighteenth century and downplaying the French Revolution as a transformative event for the female intellectual.

Lotterie casts her net broadly to include lesser-known plays such as Bougeant’s *Les Femmes Savantes* (1730) and La Montagne’s satire directed against Émilie du Châtelet, *La Physicienne*, as well as major novels like Marivaux’s *La vie de Marianne*. She considers counter-Enlightenment texts such as Pallisot’s *Les philosophes* (1760) as well as texts by Diderot and Voltaire, and she insists on the importance of analyzing libertine literature, including de Sade, as well as sentimental novels. She also analyzes non-fiction treatises and letters. This broad scope allows Lotterie to explore a series of eighteenth-century scenarios, or “fictions,” that drew on ancient ideas about women and philosophy (kept alive in the recurring image of philosopher Crates’ wife, Hipparchia), but also generated new ideas and images that had important consequences for eighteenth-century women. According to Lotterie, these fictions of the “*femme philosophe*” created a kind of “magasin de lieux rhétoriques avec lesquels jouent les acteurs réels dans leurs relations intellectuelles: c’est pourquoi on ne s’intéressera pas seulement ici au roman ou au théâtre, aux traités, aux dictionnaires, mais aussi aux correspondances et aux mémoires....” (pp. 21-22).

For historians, Lotterie’s exploration of such a broad range of texts makes this book particularly useful, opening up a rich collection of works for consideration and creating suggestive links between words, images, and the intellectual lives of real women such as Châtelet, Épinay, Charrière, and Staël. While Lotterie’s subject is largely the powerful fantasies about the *femme philosophe* found within fictional literature, she laces her analysis with asides to her readers about the limits of fiction, reminding them that “Le roman engage des fictions de vies possibles; mais il résiste mal à l’épreuve du réel et de ses censures, en particulier sur l’éducation des femmes” (p. 100). Moreover, she grounds the discourse on the “*femme philosophe*” by reminding her readers that it was often a response to real women who were perceived to be overstepping the boundaries between the world of women and the world of philosophers.

Of the many real women addressed in Lotterie’s study, one in particular haunts her analysis, the courtesan and intellectual Ninon de Lenclos (1620-1705). Lotterie argues that Ninon became a mythic reminder of the possibility of “une femme qui aurait su prendre sur elle le ‘masculin’ de la philosophie sans cesser d’être femme et délicieusement femme” (p. 22). For Lotterie, Ninon de Lenclos is truly the “contre-modèle à Sophie” (p. 58) who offers to eighteenth-century men and women the fragile hope that women could be intellectuals. This was a hope that Voltaire expressed when he praised Lenclos in his treatise *Sur Mademoiselle de Lenclos* (1751) and when he described Épinay, his friend and fellow author, with these words: “Sa philosophie était véritable, ferme, invariable, au-dessus des préjugés et des vaines recherches” (p.112). Voltaire, “champion de femmes,” is one of the heroes of Lotterie’s story. He came as close to Poulain de la Barre’s position on women’s intellect as any eighteenth-century writer. Lotterie reminds us, however, that many men in the eighteenth century fixated on Ninon’s exceptionality,

promiscuity, refusal to marry, and rejection of maternity. For them she was an ugly reminder of the troubles caused when women left behind their socially useful roles as mothers and wives and dared to enter into the intellectual world of men. As Lotterie concludes, “Voilà pourquoi Ninon de Lenclos est au XVIIIe siècle un mythe à la fois captateur et repulsive” (p. 156).

Lotterie’s study is divided into three sections: Part 1, “Le Féminin du Philosophe,” which focuses on concerns about the feminization of philosophy; Part 2, “Le Féminin et Le Philosophe,” which explores the potential and peril of the model of the philosophical couple and men’s and women’s intellectual collaboration; and Part 3, “Le Philosophe, Les Femmes et le Politique,” which explores how the attitudes towards women and philosophy confronted political change and adopted the terms of medical discourse in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period.

In part one, “Le Féminin du Philosophe,” Lotterie argues that the sport of ridiculing *femmes savants* was alive and well in the eighteenth century, fueled by the anti-philosophe literature best typified by Palissot’s play, *Les Philosophes* (1760), and by Teisserenc’s play, *La femme philosophe* (1759). Male writers transformed the potentially empowering term “*la philosophesse*” (the female philosopher) into a stinging insult to learned women that stressed that women’s sophistry triumphed over their intelligence. Female philosophers of antiquity were presented as oddities, exotic specimens from long ago. Anti-philosophe authors accused the women in the circle of philosophes of sowing sexual disorder and social confusion as they attempted to “*partager la culotte*” with men. Yet, in this section Lotterie also explores the range of possibilities, including autodidacticism, for female intellectual empowerment in Marivaux’s *La vie de Marianne* (1731-1745), and the possibility of a materialist conception of female autonomy and ways of knowing in Diderot’s *Les bijoux indiscrets*, among other texts.

Lotterie traces the deep ambivalence over the role of women in philosophy to one of the foundational works of the French Enlightenment, Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), a vernacular treatise on heliocentrism in the form of a dialog between a philosopher and a marquise. Lotterie argues that *Entretiens* resisted satirizing female savants and created a serious dialog about the role of women and *eros* in the world of science and philosophy that articulated a new libertine position that would have lasting implications for the ways in which eighteenth-century men conceptualized their relationship to learned women. Fontenelle’s marquise manages to escape the ridiculousness of Moliere’s *femme savant* or the danger of courtesans like Ninon, who corrupts philosophy, but Fontenelle offers only a limited role for women in philosophy as consumers, not producers, of knowledge. Lotterie concludes that Fontenelle’s model reminded women that they needed to keep in mind that “La ‘femme philosophe’ ne doit jamais oublier qu’elle n’est pas précisément une ‘philosophe femme’, c’est-à-dire qu’elle n’est pas autorisée à entrer activement dans la pratique masculine du savoir philosophique en tant que femme” (p. 74).

Part two elaborates the theme set up in Fontenelle’s *Entretiens*: how could one imagine a learned man and woman living and learning together as intellectuals? Lotterie addresses the intricacy of the “philosophical couple” and the “Xanthippe effect” (the cultural injunction against learned men marrying) through a lengthy analysis of works such as Prévost’s *Cleveland*, *Thérèse philosophe*, and Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, among other works. Particularly interesting is Lotterie’s exploration of the ways in which men imagined women’s education. Since fantasies of the harem and fears of women in public terrified men, Lotterie argues that they turned to the home and family as the central theatre for women’s education. The relationship between fathers and daughters particularly animated discussions of the education of the “*femme philosophe*.” In the fictions of Diderot and de Sade, Lotterie explores the role of the potentially transgressive status of “*épicières*,” daughters who were only children.[3]

The analysis in the first two parts of the book is more nuanced and original than in the final part, “Le Philosophes, Les Femmes et le Politique.”[4] Apart from the heightened attention to medical tracts that began to saturate the discourse on the “*femme philosophe*” by the late eighteenth century, Lotterie argues

that very little about the debates over women and philosophy changed with the Revolution. During the Revolution, Lotterie argues, “Pour dévaluer la prétention féminine à être ‘philosophe’, cependant, les mêmes recettes continuent leur imperturbable carrière” (p. 260).

Throughout her book Lotterie addresses the secondary scholarship on many topics with a light hand, but in part three, her decision not to engage fully one of the richest historiographies in gender history, the debate over the Revolution’s impact on women, feels like a missed opportunity. Historians will ask how her argument for continuity in the model of the “*femme philosophe*” responds to the work of scholars such as Geneviève Fraisse and Carla Hesse, among others, who have compellingly argued for a rupture in the late-eighteenth century in attitudes towards women and gender ideology.[5]

That said, debating historians is not Lotterie’s primary objective. As she clearly states in the first sentence of her book, her goal is to argue against literary scholar Pierre Fauchery, whose monumental 1972 publication, *La destinée féminine dans le roman européen du dix-huitième siècle* [6], devoted little attention to the role of female philosophers in the eighteenth-century novel: “Ce livre [Lotterie’s book] est d’abord né d’un constat: contrairement à ce que la vaste enquête de Pierre Fauchery sur la présence des femmes dans le roman de XVIIIe siècle a naguère choisi de mettre en perspective, la ‘philosophie’ fait massivement partie de la ‘gynécomythie’ de la période” (p. 1).

Lotterie’s criticism of Fauchery goes beyond calling out his omission of women and philosophy. She also argues that Fauchery and other male critics from the Goncourts in the nineteenth century to Paul Hoffman in the late twentieth century have evinced a dangerous sympathy with the myths about women that men created in the eighteenth century.[7] Lotterie asserts that these scholars think that they are being sympathetic to women when they are actually being sympathetic to eighteenth-century men’s myths about women. Lotterie points out that although Fauchery rhapsodizes, “No one can forget that the eighteenth century is the century of women,” this “*femme*” is herself a myth, and it is necessary to explore all its ambiguities (p. 13). Above all, Lotterie seeks to question the nostalgia of the Goncourts for the amiable and passive women of the eighteenth century, who knew how to be “just philosophical enough” to accept their position in society (p. 301). In Lotterie’s engaging analysis, the “*femme philosophe*” emerges as a central figure in eighteenth-century French literature, a troubling and dangerous fiction that performed tremendous cultural work as it sought to keep philosophical women in their proper place.

## NOTES

[1] “The social history of ideas,” a phrase coined by Peter Gay, is particularly associated with the work of Robert Darnton. See Robert Darnton, “In Search of the Enlightenment: Recent attempts to create a social history of ideas,” *Journal of Modern History* 43(1971): 113-132.

[2] Florence Lotterie, *Littérature et sensibilité* (Paris: Ellipses, 1998) and *Progrès et perfectibilité, un dilemme des Lumières françaises (1755-1814)* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2006).

[3] Lotterie takes the term *épiclères* from the analysis of work of Michèle Le Doeuff, *Le sexe du savoir* (Paris: Aubier, 1998), p. 193.

[4] Lotterie (p. 252) incorrectly dates Jean-Pierre-André Amar’s speech to the National Assembly as October 30, 1794. The date of the speech, engraved in the memories of most womens’ historians as one of the most significant speeches of the Revolution, took place on October 30, 1793, at the height of the Terror.

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[5] Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason's Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[6] Pierre Fauchery, *La destinée féminine dans le roman européen du dix-huitième siècle: 1713-1807: essai de gynécomythie Romanesque* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972).

[7] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *La femme au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Didot, 1862); Paul Hoffman, *La femme dans la pensée des Lumières* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1995).

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