

Claude Abraham, ed. *Actes de Davis. Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 40. Biblio 17, ed. Wolfgang Leiner. (Paris, Seattle and Tübingen: 1988). 227 pp.

This volume contains the proceedings of the twentieth annual conference of the North American Society for Seventeenth Century French Literature, held at the University of California, Davis, March 24-26, 1988. The program featured three topics: Mme de La Fayette, *Les caractères*, and "La femme et le pouvoir au théâtre." Claude Abraham indicates in his Preface that in addition to the papers actually read, the volume includes some submissions for which there was no time on the program. Unfortunately, space does not permit mention of all the articles printed in the *Actes*.

The Mme de La Fayette section could be placed under the aegis of Bernard Beugnot ("Madame de La Fayette aux enfers ou l'enfer de Madame de La Fayette"). Beugnot calls forth the shade of the author in Hades, who bemoans three centuries of abuse at the hands of critics and biographers. Moved by her sufferings, Pluto and Beugnot himself intervene to demand a five-year moratorium on La Fayette studies, particularly of the post-modern variety.

Undeterred by Mme de La Fayette's supplications, eight other critics propose analyses here. Roger Duchêne, in "Mme de La Fayette, femme d'influence," combines biographical and literary approaches to argue that Mme de La Fayette, a strong personality, transforms the Duc de Nemours into a passive character. Alain Niderst ("Pour une interprétation allégorique de *La Princesse de Clèves*") comments on seven sentences which he deems representative of the work as a whole. Niderst, like Duchêne, confronts fiction to reality, novel to history, but his "allegorical" sentences are presented out of context rather than within the structure of the novel. In "Zaïde: Just Another Love Story?" Donna Kuizenga offers a feminist reading of a novel often neglected by critics. "*La Princesse de Clèves: Un théâtre de la vérité oblique*", by Simone Ackerman, treats the influence of classical theater on

the novel and discerns a five-act play within Mme de Lafayette's work.

In "*La Princesse de Clèves* ou la création d'une non-femme", Jean Charron suggests that Mme de Clèves was "programmed" by her mother to become a "frigid" woman, fearful of love. Richard G. Hodgson, adopting a literary rather than a moral perspective, presents Mme de Thémises' letter to the Vidame de Chartres as an example of *mise en abyme* and the pivotal point of the fiction ("*Mise en abyme* and the narrative system of *La Princesse de Clèves*"). Carleen S. Leggett ("Two Women: The Princesse de Clèves and the Marquise de Termes") compares Mme de La Fayette with Mme de Villedieu. Finally, Ruth Redhead discusses the symbolism of enclosures in all of Mme de La Fayette's novels, and their association with deception and disillusionment. A small cavil: could authors and editor agree on La Fayette or Lafayette?

Louis van Delft opens the *Caractères* section with a searching examination of La Bruyère's "anthropologie," which he defines in the classical sense of "discours sur l'homme." He then proceeds to formulate his own "anthropologie littéraire," applying modern categories to La Bruyère's thought. He concludes that La Bruyèrian "anthropologie" is "chrétienne, ptoléméenne, aristotéli-cienne," but most of all "humaniste." Under the sign of Walter Benjamin, James Gaines analyzes "Des biens de fortune" in the context of early capitalism. In contrast to van Delft's more traditional reading, Gaines portrays La Bruyère's text as pointing toward the future. But it is not clear whether Gaines' cyclical image of history owes more to the medieval wheel of Fortune or to Balzacian *splendeurs et misères*.

As in her earlier studies, Louise Horowitz proclaims the evanescence of the La Bruyèrian *caractère* and his world, and portrays writing as the only means to escape that evanescence. She compares La Bruyère's seeking for transcendence through writing to Roquentin's insight at the end of Sartre's *La Nausée* ("La Bruyère's Nausea.") In "Dire je: La Bruyère et ses caractères," Maurice Delcroix examines the problematics of the first-person pronoun in a text where the narrator

patently is not speaking in his own name. An interesting subject which would bear further study.

In "Une Lecture du chapitre 'Des femmes,'" Eva H. Avigdor points out that the satire *La Bruyère* directs against women could, but usually is not, directed against men as well. She discerns an underlying misogyny in the text, a feeling that women pose a danger to men. Finally, Philip Berk, in a subtle reading of "de la mode," claims that "order is very much *La Bruyère's* conservative subtext" but also reveals the tensions and contradictions present within that order ("De la mode": *La Bruyère* and the Myth of order.)

The section on "La Femme et le pouvoir au théâtre" contains numerous presentations on Corneille, Molière and Racine, and one exploration of Thomas Corneille (Alex del Pino). In his opening article, Jean V. Dubu examines the image of ruling women in the seventeenth century and concludes that the true power of women lies in abnegation of power. Eva Jellinek, on the contrary, holds Corneille's *Emilie* up as an aggressive female role model for the nation to follow ("La Divine *Emilie*."). Claire Carlin, drawing support from Montaigne and Carol Gilligan, proposes a dissident model for female will in Corneille ("The Desire to Heal, the Power to Protest".) Catherine Spencer, in "D'Agrippine à Atalide: La parole au pouvoir?" examines the significance of naming and the relation between speech, liberation and control. François Lagarde distinguishes between Molière's "comédies du savoir et du pouvoir," and suggests that there are acceptable and unacceptable ways of circumventing patriarchal power ("La Comédie féminine chez Molière").

In sum, this volume contains several interesting studies, with its greatest strength concentrated in the *La Bruyère* section. The *plaisir de la lectrice* would have been increased by greater attention to proofreading and use of a larger type face.

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