

Garapon, Jean. *La Grande Mademoiselle Mémorialiste: Une Autobiographie dans le temps.* (Geneva: Droz, 1989). Pp. 290.

Over the centuries, Anne-Marie-Louise-Henriette d'Orléans, the Duchesse de Montpensier, has attracted more attention on both sides of the Atlantic than the majority of her seventeenth-century female counterparts. In France, the renewed interest of the past few years has primarily taken the form of biographies, and even a radio program devoted to her tumultuous life. In the United States, scholars have been drawn to Montpensier's literary corpus, especially her *Mémoires*, in their efforts to resurrect women's literary enterprises from critical oblivion. Professor Garapon's study is an attempt to combine the two approaches by analyzing the *Mémoires* as Montpensier's effort to write her own life story. Specifically, Garapon's objective is to introduce the public to "un texte peu connu, et pourtant fort attachant" (9) that he considers an early link in the chain of autobiographical writing. In *La Grande Mademoiselle*, Garapon offers a detailed description of Montpensier's text, and specifies the various influences—worldly, novelistic and theatrical—that he views as permeating the entire work.

Montpensier's *Mémoires* is a vast and complex literary project that spanned more than half a century. In order to endow the text with order and purpose, Garapon insists that Montpensier's sole intention was to write of herself for a select female public drawn to "les aventures d'une princesse romanesque" (217). Garapon dismisses any other motivations, especially the possibility that Montpensier intended to write an historical account of her time. Statements such as: "Mademoiselle considère le domaine historique comme tout à fait étranger à son entreprise" (43), "Ses mémoires sont écrits à plaisir et pour le plaisir, loin de toute utilité morale ou historique" (61), and "elle refuse de faire oeuvre d'historienne" (217) are a constant refrain, but are not supported by careful textual analysis. Garapon thus reads one of Montpensier's remarks—"Ce n'est que pour moi que j'écris" as her sole statement of purpose, despite the fact that in other authorial

interventions she openly contradicts this narcissistic stance. Garapon studies each part of the *Mémoires* as a step in Montpensier's construction of her literary "I." After an introductory biography of the princess, the author distinguishes between the four periods of composition in his second chapter, and isolates what he views as the novelistic characteristics of Montpensier's text in Chapter III. The critic then turns to the historical aspects of the text, namely the princess's account of the Fronde, in order to examine her "sentiment de la gloire." In Chapter V, Garapon becomes more introspective and reconstructs Montpensier's personality, specifically her moral code and her sense of humor. The final chapter, entitled "Des Mémoires «Véridiques et Fidèles»," is an attempt to determine just how much truth value is to be accorded to Montpensier's text. Throughout his study, Garapon privileges Montpensier's relation of her affair with the Comte de Lauzun (1670-71), a year which he views as structuring and profoundly influencing the work as a whole. It is these events which endow the narrative with "une coherance formelle" (93) in Garapon's words.

This privileging of one moment in Montpensier's life is revelatory of the politics of Garapon's reading. As this critic wishes to portray the *Mémoires* only as an autobiographical enterprise and as a pleasant diversion, he focuses on the most interiorized and novelistic moments of the narrative, to the detriment of the majority of the text in which a much more complex and untraditional story surfaces. Garapon's portrayal of the *Mémoires* as an autobiography unwittingly composed by a woman is a disturbing critical stance of pre-feminist days. In Garapon's text, what is actually implied by the term "autobiography" remains theoretically vague, and the consequences of its use in the analysis of a seventeenth-century text remain silenced. Garapon draws his definition from Philippe Lejeune, yet does not problematize the issues by acknowledging that Lejeune himself does not consider seventeenth-century memoirs as autobiography, and in fact identifies the birth of the genre as Rousseau's *Confessions*. Nor does Lejeune, in the works cited by Garapon, find any pre-twentieth-century women's texts to

be truly autobiographical. Garapon consistently compares Montpensier's *Mémoires* with Lejeune's model, Rousseau, in order to identify the autobiographical characteristics. By reading Montpensier through a male model, Garapon reduces the text to its most conventional elements. The author's complete silencing of the critical issues connected with female textual identity and narrative representation can be attributed to the fact that he relies exclusively on Lejeune's formulation of autobiography, and valorizes Marie-Thérèse Hipp's interpretation of Montpensier's *Mémoires*. No current feminist discussions of female authorship or autobiography figure in his bibliography, and recent American scholarship is almost entirely absent from this study.

Garapon's historical and literary contextualization of Montpensier's *Mémoires* is often as limited as his theoretical context. Garapon views the *Mémoires* as having been strongly influenced by a number of authors such as Gomberville, La Calprenède, d'Urfé, Scudéry, and especially Corneille, an opinion which could have been strengthened by more precise and exact textual analysis rather than by general reflections such as "l'année 1652 [the Fronde] ne serait-elle qu'une parenthèse héroïque, une sorte de bouffée de Cornélianisme dans la vie d'une femme marquée par le malheur, déçue dans ses affections, profondément attachée à son enfance?" (235). Garapon explains the fact that Montpensier does not refer to these other writers, advancing that "le refus de révéler les influences qui s'exercent sur elle traduit ainsi, outre une naïveté révélatrice, le refus de la position d'écrivain" (242).

The historical context within which Garapon situates the text is equally generalized. This is especially apparent in the chapter devoted to the question of the truth of Montpensier's *Mémoires*, and to the discussion of the Fronde. The critic rejects any possibility that Montpensier viewed her actions during the Fronde as having any historical significance. In so doing, Garapon is in agreement with H. Méthivier, the only historian of the Fronde in the bibliography, but not with another group of historians, headed by P.-G. Lorrin, who take seriously the

princess's and other women's participation in this civil war. By relying solely on the perspective of one historian, Garapon dismisses the princess as an historical actor of consequence, and the possibility that her memoirs were composed in part to tell this history. Similarly, when Garapon turns to the "truth" of the *Mémoires*, he relies only on Méthivier's version of the *Fonde*. The "truth" against which he measures Montpensier's text is in itself questionable, given that it is drawn from one historian, from biographies, and from other accounts of Montpensier's own contemporaries, such as Retz and Bossuet. These moves allow Garapon to assert that the real "truth" in the *Mémoires* lies solely in its reflection of the personality of its author. It is a "type de vérité profondément autobiographique...la vérité la plus précieuse réside dans l'image fidèle, et changeant, qu'ils offrent de la narratrice" (233-34).

The "faithful" self-portrait that Garapon valorizes as the most important aspect of the *Mémoires* is in many respects constructed by the critic himself, drawn from the myth of La Grande Mademoiselle as passed down from biographers and critics such as Sainte-Beuve, and from assumptions of the place and role of women in seventeenth-century French society, their relationship to the classical canon, and of the woman as a writing subject. In the final analysis, Garapon offers us another biography, at times very novelistic, of this illustrious princess, which he legitimizes by appropriating Montpensier's own text. This biography is also a kind of meditation on Montpensier and on her text, a meditation that includes judgments such as "Mademoiselle vivait intensément, trop peut-être (65). In Garapon's constructed biography, Montpensier is a writer in spite of herself, who composes only to divert herself from a disappointing reality: "La mémoire, comme l'écriture, lui permettent de mener une seconde vie, corrigée et embellie" (249); "Mademoiselle, qui a manqué sa vie, a trouvé son juste accomplissement comme écrivain" (270). Garapon portrays her as someone who views her entire existence as an "échec"—"Mademoiselle reconnaît avec franchise l'échec de son existence" (190)—due primarily to the fact that she never enjoyed a successful

relationship with a man. In this biography, the princess's own text figures most often as writing best paraphrased, as the critic often rewrites the princess's story to underscore this "échec" of a seventeenth-century woman. Garapon most frequently refers the reader to Montpensier's text through page numbers in footnotes. In his description, the author reflects the conventional perception of this truly unconventional woman, and is in agreement with the traditional assessment of many of her French biographers.

Garapon's work has the merit of introducing more readers to Montpensier's fascinating and complex text. As the author states in his Avant-Propos, his present work is only "une étape dans une entreprise d'ensemble, l'étude de Mademoiselle écrivain" (9). *La Grande Mademoiselle* will hopefully inspire other critics to join Garapon in the study of one of France's most renowned princesses and most neglected authors.

Faith E. Beasley