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Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Publishing Women's Life Stories in France, 1647-1720: From Voice to Print*. Aldershot and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001. viii + 172 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $74.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7546-0370-9.

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Elizabeth Goldsmith's *Publishing Women's Life Stories in France, 1647-1720* is that rarity among academic books: a page-turner. Building upon her previous work,[1] Goldsmith brings together the autobiographical writings of six intriguing seventeenth-century French women with the story of how their works got into print in the first place and how they were (and continue to be) received. The quest for legitimacy as authors at a time when public display of the female self was a risky business makes for an exciting narrative, in large part thanks to Goldsmith's elegant and engaging style. She has chosen to focus on women writers whose talent for capturing the reader's imagination matches her own: three religious and three worldly women serve as models to describe the challenges and opportunities facing the female author just as publishers were beginning to appreciate the commercial potential of texts written by women.

Women were the pioneers in a new type of life-writing wherein personal experience and personal style were increasingly valued, as opposed to the supposed objectivity of traditional "male" memoirs. All of the women studied here wrote at least partly to justify their conduct, which included a departure from the norms of the period and often a physical departure from home and hearth. The subversive potential of these women's travels makes their texts socially dangerous, and care needed to be taken by the authors as well as by their editors and publishers to avoid censure. Unusual stories colored with hints of scandal, their works were eagerly read in the early modern era, but authorities from many realms (political, ecclesiastical, literary, scientific) then and in subsequent centuries have tried to influence the reception of these texts. Thanks to the efforts of scholars such as Goldsmith, these women are given back their eloquence.

The cultivation of the inner self can be seen as a trend that affected the writing of spiritual texts, history, and novels. We may speculate as to the causes of this shift toward the validation of personal narratives: the Counter-Reformation's renewal of individual spiritual life, the self-justification of nobles in exile after the Fronde, and increased textual production by women beginning during the Regency of Anne of Austria all contributed to new forms of life-writing. In communicating with an audience, whether a religious director, intimate or distant correspondents, participants in salons, or the larger reading public, the women studied here all entered into a process of identity construction through their writing and its diffusion.

In her first three chapters, Goldsmith explores the works of two nuns, Marie de l'Incarnation and Jeanne des Anges, as well as the multi-faceted publications of Jeanne Guyon, a religious leader who never took the veil. All three were mystics, but Marie de l'Incarnation and Jeanne des Anges wrote early enough in the seventeenth century that their writings could be integrated into the post-Tridentine discourse welcoming mysticism--at least when such mysticism fit into acceptable modes of private devotion in the manner of François de Sales. Nonetheless, the moves of these women were controversial

during their lifetimes. Silent prayer and silent reading could lead to dangerous independence of thought, a threat to the status quo born out by the activities of all three--activities inspired by the development of personal forms of worship.

Marie de l'Incarnation, a young widow, left her ten year-old son in order to enter an Ursuline convent when she was thirty (in 1631), thus fulfilling a long-standing desire to devote herself to the spiritual life, to finding the "inner way" to God through contemplation. But the Ursulines blending of the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* allowed Marie to pursue missionary work as well; her leadership as the first woman missionary to Canada is well known. Goldsmith's chapter illustrates the tension expressed by many religious women between anxiety about autobiographical writing as a demonstration of vanity, on the one hand, and a desire to write and control the destiny of their work, on the other hand. First encouraged to practice written confession by her spiritual directors, Marie de l'Incarnation evolved into an author conscious of shaping her texts, of being an interlocutor on an equal footing with her male colleagues, capable of teaching others. Despite the prohibition on female preaching, Marie, like Jeanne des Anges and Jeanne Guyon, became an effective and influential communicator both orally and in writing with an admiring, far-flung audience. Her accounts of life in Canada formed an important part of the *Jesuit Relations* so crucial to garnering support for the missions. Although writing about her missionary activities was a duty, Marie experienced guilt over the intensely personal and autobiographical text that she composed at the request of her son, Claude Martin, and under the encouragement of her spiritual director. As a result, she asked that it be kept secret.

The paradoxical result was the publication in 1672, almost immediately after Marie's death, of *La Vie de la vénérable Mère Marie de l'Incarnation*, a composite text containing her autobiography and extracts from her correspondence, interspersed with commentary from her son. Claude denied self-conscious authorship on the part of his mother and insisted that her "innocent" writing and "pure" insights involved no intellectual construction. And yet she remained an authority, someone to be published, studied, quoted. According to Goldsmith, Claude's version of his mother's text established a model for female life-writing: Marie wrote first from a position of submission to another, who commanded her to write, whereupon her texts were edited, so that she lost ultimate authority over them. Female modesty and male hegemony were thus conveniently preserved.

Jeanne des Anges, whose story has been studied by Michel de Certeau among many others,[2] fits into the above model in that her confessor encouraged her to write, not only to explore her own spiritual development but also to further the work of the church. Jeanne had been one of the famous nuns of Loudun possessed in the 1630s by demons and then exorcized by the Jesuit mystic Jean-Joseph Surin, who subsequently had to be hospitalized himself in the throes of deep melancholy. Jeanne was asked to continue Surin's memoir of the events at Loudun, but after the first installment presented to her confessor, Saint-Jure, Jeanne kept her narrative to herself, preferring to emphasize her own spiritual life rather than the racier subjects of her sufferings while possessed and Surin's performance as an exorcist. It was Surin's controversial treatment of the possessed through mental prayer and confession rather than through dramatic public displays that allowed Jeanne to experiment with life-writing and to find her voice. By taking on personal culpability and responsibility for her possession, Jeanne gained control of her existence and of the manner in which it would be presented to a public hungry to see her stigmata and to hear her tale of struggle with the devil. That public included Richelieu, Anne of Austria, and Louis XIII (whom she met in 1638). She emerged from her ordeal and the public telling of it with a written self-portrait of strength and triumph, a text that was, like so many women's life stories, subjected to a deforming editorial intervention. When Jeanne's autobiography, circulated in manuscript form into the eighteenth century, was finally published in its entirety in 1886, she was presented as an hysteric, the perfect example of a diseased mind. This edition of the *Autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée* was reprinted in 1985.[3] Goldsmith contrasts Jeanne des Ange's vision of herself as in control and touched by grace with this damaging editorial stance, preserved well into our era. Jeanne herself was well aware of the role of mediators and of texts by others in determining how her life story would

be received, but her self-consciousness had little impact on the reception of her work until Goldsmith and other recent scholars freed her story from the damaging nineteenth-century context.[4]

The last of Goldsmith's religious subjects, Jeanne Guyon, found her teachings condemned by the church in 1687 and later received seven years of imprisonment (1696-1703). Having left her family in 1680 at the age of thirty-two in order to travel across France on a proselytizing mission, she became a celebrity with the publication in 1685 of *Le Moyen Court*, a treatise on the benefits of silent prayer leading to a private and intimate relationship with God. Guyon's use of metaphors of the experience and practice of motherhood became controversial when Bossuet, the powerful Bishop of Meaux, condemned her brand of mysticism as dangerous to Catholics. Bossuet insisted on reading her metaphors of the body literally, giving them a potentially erotic import. Guyon's self-image as a symbolic mother nursing "on demand" her followers hungry for spiritual nourishment particularly disturbed him since she appeared to be claiming apostolic authority. The democratization of worship implicit in her approach contributed to Bossuet's wrath, as did her claim of divine inspiration for her autobiographical writings. Goldsmith demonstrates the originality of Guyon's strategy for maintaining her influence: she was a spiritual guide who insisted upon a totally personal experience of spirituality for her followers, outside the realm of authority--even her own.

Goldsmith notes that maternal imagery disappeared after the condemnation of Guyon's writings, thus confirming its subversive potential. Although the bishop and well-known author Fénelon attempted to counter Bossuet's persecution of Jeanne Guyon, mysticism disappeared from French catholicism at the end of the seventeenth century, largely as a result of the suppression of her writings and those of Fénelon himself.[5] Nonetheless, Guyon's influence over Protestant sects in England and Germany continued, and she carefully cultivated these relationships through further publications abroad in the fourteen years she lived after being released from the Bastille.

The three worldly authors treated in this book also entered into the struggle to exert some control over their life stories as presented to the public. Hortense and Marie Mancini, two of the nieces of Cardinal Mazarin, both left their husbands and wrote memoirs to justify their flight. With the exception of Marguerite de Valois, Hortense and Marie were the first women to put their lives into print in France. Marie-Catherine Hortense Desjardins, the novelist known as Madame de Villedieu, was inspired to write by the Mancinis' adventures as well as by her own experiences as an unmarried woman living at a time when either marriage or a religious vocation were usually women's only life choices. These women all spent time in prison or sought refuge in convents. But rather than develop a religious vocation, all three focused on the problem of marriage and participated in the debates about the role of wives that were particularly heated during the last three decades of the seventeenth century.[6]

When the Mancinis took to the road, it was necessary to explain their conduct in voluminous correspondence with intimates and with those who might help them to find refuge. But when they became the subject of other writers' narratives--in gossip, letters, gazettes and pamphlets, and, in Marie's case, in false memoirs--the only way to gain some control over their own stories was through autobiography. Hortense made the move to memoirs as part of an attempt to win judicial battles for the right of separation and for access to her dowry. Her husband, made the duke of Mazarin by the Cardinal upon marrying Hortense, was portrayed by her (and by contemporaries) as a mentally unstable, possessive spendthrift who wanted to control his wife's every move and every contact. Hortense left the family home in 1668 but did not publish her memoirs until 1675, by which time she was notorious throughout Europe. Unfortunately, her memoirs were used against her in court battles with her husband as late as 1689, so she was reluctant to use life-writing again after her first attempt. She did, however, leave written defense of her behavior to her lawyer and to loyal friends such as Saint-Evremond, who was with her in exile in England where she spent the last twenty-four years of her life (p. 114).

Marie was much more aggressive in the promotion of her memoir, *La vérité dans son jour*, published in 1677 in reaction to an apocryphal text of 1676. Her marriage to the powerful Connetable of Colonna took her from the court of Louis XIV, where she had been the young king's first love, to Rome and a return to her Italian roots. Her married life seemed much less difficult than Hortense's, but she too objected to her husband's attempts to restrict her movements. Her departure was inspired by Colonna's threat to imprison her in a convent; ironically, she was to spend many years in a convent in Spain--with her ability to travel restricted until 1689 and Colonna's death--despite her continuing insistence that she was a free woman.

What is most striking in Elizabeth Goldsmith's study of the Mancini sisters' memoirs is their publishing history to this day. The role of male novelists as "secretaries," César de Saint-Réal for Hortense and Sébastien Brémond for Marie, has detracted from the notion of female authorship of these texts. Saint-Réal made no claim as either author or editor of Hortense's memoirs, but they were published with his works well into the nineteenth century (p. 104). Marie had to deal not only with the apocryphal memoirs, re-published as her own as late as 1997,[7] but also with Brémond's unauthorized rewriting of her text, which removed her resistant, resilient, and unrepentant tone. This version was much better known than hers in the seventeenth century, and it was the basis of Gérard Doscot's 1987 edition.[8] Not until Goldsmith and Patricia Cholakian published a modern edition of *La Vérité dans son jour* in 1998 was Marie's true voice finally made available to a large public.[9]

The last author examined by Goldsmith, Marie-Catherine Desjardins, was a scandalous women in her own right who took the name of her unfaithful lover, Antoine de Villedieu, after his death. Goldsmith explores Madame de Villedieu's *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* as a fictionalized memoir reflecting some of the adventures of Hortense and Marie as well as her own. Published between 1669 and 1674, just at the time of the Mancinis' initial wanderings, the novel addresses issues important for all upper-class women who would question their wifely duty and seek to change the conventional plot of their lives as the sisters and Villedieu had done. In the novel, the heroine observes her notoriety with an ironic distance which she uses as a tool to take partial control of her public image, but perhaps Henriette-Sylvie's recognition that full control is not possible is the most valuable lesson Villedieu put forth. This is a lesson the author followed when Monsieur de Villedieu sold her love letters. Unable to prevent their publication in 1668, she retaliated by authorizing a new collection a year later, reframed by her. Madame de Villedieu the novelist saw more clearly than the other women writers studied by Goldsmith "the process of life-writing to be only part of a long conversation, an activity that is always of necessity fragmentary, ... as parts of a whole that is never entirely in any individual writer's grasp" (p. 152).

Goldsmith's remarkable archival work on the correspondence of these authors has allowed her to reveal aspects of their writings that a reading of the published memoirs alone could never provide. The story of the editing and reception of these texts is as fascinating as the story of the lives of the women who wrote them.

Publishing Women's Life Stories in France is the fourth volume in an exciting new series from Ashgate, entitled Women and Genre in the Early Modern World and edited by Allyson Poska and Abby Zanger. If the other volumes live up to the standard set by this one, this series will become a must for scholars of the early modern period.

NOTES

[1] *Exclusive Conversations: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston:

Northeastern University Press, 1989), ed.; and *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. with Dena Goodman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[2] Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris: Julliard, 1970).

[3] Eds. Gabriel Legué and Gilles de la Tourette (1886; rpt. Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 1985).

[4] See, for example, Marie-Florine Bruneau, *Women Mystics Confront the Modern World: Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672) and Madame Guyon (1648-1717)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[5] Fénelon's *Maximes des saints* was condemned in 1699 (p. 89). Guyon's emphasis on maternal imagery complemented Fénelon's writings on education wherein he insisted on the importance of maternal presence, a strategy not at all common among upper-class mothers at the time. See François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, *De l'Education des filles.* In *Œuvres*, ed. Jacques Le Brun (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

[6] For a discussion of the struggle between the monarch and the church over control of the institution of marriage, as well as the changing role of wives, see for example Jean Gaudemet, *Le Mariage en Occident: Les mœurs et le droit* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987); Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Jean-Claude Bologne, *Histoire du mariage en Occident* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1995).

[7] Marie Mancini, *Cendre et poussière, Mémoires*, ed. Maurice Lever (Paris: Le Comptoir, 1997).

[8] *Mémoires d'Hortense et de Marie Mancini*, ed. Gérard Doscot (Paris: Mercure de France, 1987).

[9] Marie Mancini, *La Vérité dans son jour*, ed. Patricia Francis Cholakian and Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1998). Cholakian explores the reception of Hortense's memoirs in "Sex, Lies, and Autobiography: The Memoirs of Hortense Mancini," in *Women Writers of the Ancien Régime: Strategies of Emancipation*, ed. Colette H. Winn and Donna Kuizenga (New York: Garland Press, 1997), 17-30.

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