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**Madeleine de Scudéry**, *The Story of Sapho*. Edited and translated by Karen Newman. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. xxxii + 155 pp. \$18.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-226-14399-6. 63.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8166-388; \$22.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8166-3887-X.

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The published writings of Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) fairly quickly fell from public favor and memory, along with the writings of most of the other women who published in the early modern period. Yet Scudéry was hugely popular in her own day, and in the mid-seventeenth century, as Karen Newman tells us, eager readers are said to have paid for single sheets of an appearing volume, and her lengthy and already multi-volume novels were even further subdivided by entrepreneurial booksellers. *Clélie*, *Histoire romaine* (1654-60) and *Artamène; ou, Le grand Cyrus* (1649-53), each in ten volumes, were the bestsellers of the day. Even during the upheavals of the Fronde, the mid-seventeenth-century French uprising during the regency of the minor king Louis XIV, when *Artamène* was written, readers in England were rapidly able to get their hands on its final volumes. However, not since the seventeenth century have these novels been translated into English, nor does any complete modern edition exist even in French, although Champion is beginning to reissue *Clélie*. [1]

For this reason, Karen Newman has provided a modern translation for the English-speaking reader of "The Story of Sapho," a self-contained section from *Artamène*, for Margaret King and Albert Rabil's *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* series. This series aims to provide up-to-date annotated translations accompanied by scholarly introductions of many of these lost texts—primarily, works on a variety of subjects written by women, but also male-authored works that engaged in contemporary debates on the "woman question." Many, like the writings of Scudéry, were important or controversial in their day and, since, largely forgotten. As of the date of writing, the series has twenty-five published volumes with forty-three more scheduled to appear. It is rapidly making known and available for college classroom teaching these debates and the lost tradition of early modern women's writing. Scholarly, yet accessible, these reasonably priced translations now make it possible to construct courses on the *querelle des femmes* or on women's writing in early modern Europe for students lacking the requisite languages (or the library access) to read the originals. They are also providing a fund from which to draw for those who wish to add various kinds of writings either by women, or addressing issues concerning women, to existing courses on early modern history and culture. The series is a boon for any college professor faced with a largely Anglophone student body or lacking research library facilities—i.e., to most. [2]

Each volume appears with the same general series introduction, speaking to the issue of the "other voice" and that which it contested, the dominant cultural assumptions about women in the early modern West. Here the series editors usefully lay out the key elements of Greek philosophic views on women's nature, the Roman legal tradition with regard to women's place in the family, and women's place in Christian theology. They speak briefly of women's portrayal in medieval literature and of their place in the medieval family and church, before turning to the emergence of the contestatory voices that began to question these assumptions from 1300 to 1700. Attributing the foundations of the new arguments for women's dignity, intelligence, and worthiness to the broader humanist critical program and questioning of authorities, the editors sketch the vast scope of the literary explosion that was the *querelle des femmes* during the period, beginning with Christine de Pizan. For the modern undergraduate, this introduction should be extremely helpful as a way of situating the individual texts in the series.

Volume editors, such as Karen Newman in this case, then provide volume introductions, which follow a fairly set pattern. Here, Newman provides a brief account of Scudéry's life, writings, and the latter's critical reception. She situates *Artamène* in its historical context, as Scudéry's most popular novel and a *roman à clef* whose characters were understood by contemporaries to represent key players in the Fronde, and discusses the main themes of the story.

"The Story of Sapho," with its heroine at once both the Greek poet and a portrait of Scudéry (who was called Sapho in her salon), was the longest of many stories contained within the rambling pages of *Artamène*. In 123 pages it broaches a number of topics through a series of conversations, while unfolding a romantic plot. Sapho, the witty and refined leader of a charming circle of friends, and writer of poetry renowned throughout the ancient world, downplays her learning and cultivates an appearance of noble nonchalance. A declared enemy of marriage as the enslavement of women, she fails to resist falling in love with Phaon, suffers at his lapses (Phaon disloyally refuses to be miserable when out of his beloved's company, and even enjoys the company of a former *amie*), and finally leaves with him to the utopian country of the Sarmatae once Phaon has forsworn asking her to marry him. Sapho's foil is Damophile, a pedantic showoff of her learning and a social bore, whose portrayal, Newman points out, shows that long before Molière, Scudéry was mocking the *précieuse* while differentiating her from the proper woman writer, cloaked with the mantle of *honnêteté*. The issues upon which Sapho and her friends discourse, at some length, were important to the elite mixed-sex salon culture of mid-seventeenth-century Paris: the problem of the learned lady and to what extent and for what purposes women ought to be educated; whether and how women should write; the nature of love and gallantry and the proper behavior of lover and beloved; the art of conversation. The story is thus a development from earlier Renaissance courtesy manuals such as Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*. It also marks a shift away from the heroic adventures of the earlier nine volumes of *Artamène*, towards the modern novel of interiority. What little plot there is essentially provides an opportunity for the characters to discourse at length on what some students will undoubtedly find at times to be tedious topics. If nothing else, the enterprising instructor can use the boredom destined to arise in the minds of such students to point to the irreducibility of cultural differences, and from there, dig deeper. The story is followed by the twentieth harangue from Scudéry's *Les femmes illustres; ou, Les harangues héroïques* (1642), where Scudéry defended worthy women she considered neglected by history. There, she has Sapho praise women's talents and successfully urge her friend Erinne to write.

There are many elements—its contemporary popularity, stylistic developments, critical reception, and the variety of themes it raises—that make "Sapho" a rich text (and one of manageable size) to use in the classroom. Short enough to be assigned for one class, the text can be used by instructors for a number of purposes. Literary specialists know better than I how it might be used to discuss the formal development of the novel away from the heroic action of romance, with its techniques of the conversation and the portrait.<sup>[3]</sup> Other possible literary topics include contemporary criticism of Scudéry's style by critics such as Boileau, in the context of the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, or the subject of canon formation and the exclusion of women writers, or sociological theories of conversation. Any instructor can point to the close connection between oral and written culture in the women-run salons, and discuss the communal project of salon writing. I will speak in somewhat more detail about a few possible uses from a more specifically historical perspective.

For use in a history course on the Old Regime and French Revolution, "Sapho" could nuance the understanding students have of absolutism and of ancien régime corporate society. The Fronde, the experience that so marked the young Louis XIV, teaches the vulnerability of the monarchy at this period, but also, as contemporaries saw, how, once the revolt was put down, the project to consolidate absolutism would follow. "Sapho," placed in the final volume of the novel, was written after the restoration of royal power. The characters talk, rather than adventure on the epic scale, and the story's end (with Sapho's removal to a place where she can both write and love without being forced to marry), has led at least one important commentator to interpret it as evidence that women recognized the need

to withdraw from the political realm into the literary, following the defeat of the *frondeurs* (and *frondeuses*).<sup>[4]</sup> Certainly, *Artamène's* ending can be read as a response to the failure of heroic action in the face of growing absolutism. It can also be used to raise and explore historical arguments regarding the monarchy's taming of the nobility and the nobility's withdrawal into highly cultivated and stylized politesse, such as those of Norbert Elias.<sup>[5]</sup> The story illustrates to students how the "civilizing process" from medieval to modern man, with its channeling of affect, played out behaviorally from the point of view of one contemporary recorder. But it also pushes them to look more closely at the location of power in a society so concerned with self-regulation and niceties of manners. One can ask students to think more broadly than simply considering how such "domesticated" behaviors and denial of affect serve the monarchy, by asking why these cultural elites are so invested in playing this game. What do they gain? This leads to a discussion of social mobility (venality of office, the court nobility's ruinous expenditures, misalliances, the function of the salons as *loci* for the education of the newly ennobled) and the significance of a noble culture of prestige and distinction in this threatening context. Students can thus make sense of the emerging seventeenth-century ideal of nobility known as *honnêteté*, defined by politeness, leisure, and what was earlier called *sprezzatura* in the Italian Renaissance courts, as both a mechanism to differentiate nobles from bourgeois, and a cultural code that could be learned, thus facilitating the social mobility necessary to this society. One can point to the fact that all but two characters in the story (Sapho's foil Damophile, and the latter's male admirer) sound alike, to talk about the cultural homogenization of courtly salon society that was actually socially mixed.<sup>[6]</sup> One can discuss how these elite conversational norms defined the group, creating a fictive equality within, while excluding outsiders.<sup>[7]</sup>

"Sapho" can be used in many ways in courses where gender issues in European history are of concern. Marriage is an important theme in the story, whose realities (family arrangements, concern with bloodlines, and property transmission) a reading of the story can raise. Women's lack of control over their bodies and frequent death in childbirth also help explain the fantasy of a world without marriage cultivated by Scudéry and the *précieuses*, and seen in this text. Critical reactions to the *précieuses* can be discussed as reflecting the discomfort of traditional authorities with such ideas.<sup>[8]</sup> The "learned lady" is an enormously problematic figure in the story, with Sapho at great pains to hide her learning, while Damophile displays hers and finds social condemnation in the minds of all Sapho's right-thinking circle. Students can explore what was at stake here. Instructors can discuss women's role in the salons that would later help birth the Enlightenment, and point to how women writers like Scudéry helped develop a self-aware literary public while they themselves received a complicated reception. The enormous topic of the *précieuses*, and Scudéry's relationship to that movement, can be broached.

"Sapho" might even be used by the imaginative instructor in a non-textbook based version of Western Civilization, as the context within which it was written, as well as its themes and formal qualities, touch on issues important to European history such as the long-term rise of the centralizing state, family-state relations, and social evolution from a corporate society to one defined by class. As a turning point in the emergence of the modern novel, "Sapho" also looks ahead to modernity's acute self-awareness and psychological investigations.<sup>[9]</sup>

The translation is generally clear and readable, with the meaning confusing in only a few areas (likely due to Scudéry's own run-on style). In places, more annotation might have been useful. However, this is a short, accessible text that provides a clear window onto key cultural issues in seventeenth-century France, with much scope for classroom use.

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## NOTES

[1] There are 1972 and 1973 Slatkine reprints of both Artamène and Clélie, and vols. 1-3 of the latter have now been published by Champion (2001-2003).

[2] In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that I participated this summer in the NEH Institute on early modern European women writers organized and run by series co-editor Albert Rabil, which relied heavily on the use of "The Other Voice" publications. I have thus been witness to and sympathize with Rabil's attempts to make such works known to university professors in the hopes of making this literature more widely known and taught.

[3] See Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[4] See DeJean. The Fronde had important female leaders, such as the Duchesse de Longueville and the Grande Mademoiselle.

[5] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols., trans. Edmund Jephcott, vol. 1, *The History of Manners* and vol. 2, *Power and Civility* (New York: Pantheon, 1978 and 1982), and *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

[6] See Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[7] See Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, "Exclusive Conversations": *The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988)

[8] See DeJean, e.g., pp. 21-22.

[9] See DeJean.

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