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Janine M. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris. Gender, Economy, and Law*. Aldershot, England and Burlington, Vt.T : Ashgate, 2007. ix +252 pp. Bibliography and index. \$114.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780754656432.

Review by Jennifer M. Jones, Rutgers University.

As Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740-1814) strolled the streets of Paris in the late eighteenth-century, observing the workaday world that would fill his *Tableau de Paris*, he noted that the wives of artisans and small-scale merchants were among the happiest in Paris and that they had more power in their households than the wives of bailiffs, clerks, and officers. [1] If these women were powerful while they were married, they were potentially even more powerful, according to Janine Lanza, when widowed. Lanza's carefully researched study of the widows of early modern France offers strong support for the claim that the Parisian guild structure provided widows of the artisan class a measure of power, agency, and financial security afforded few other women in early modern societies. Lanza finds widows working in some capacity in nearly every incorporated guild in early modern Paris. Far from falling into poverty when their husbands died, these widows often assumed the title of *maîtresse* and maintained their deceased husbands' businesses as "honorary men." [2] Many were so successful that they felt no need to remarry, and Lanza contends that those who did remarry did so not out of desperation, but to further their own financial and familial interests.

For decades social historians and women's historians have considered widows as liminal figures in early modern society. Widows were unmarried, yet no longer legal minors; they were sexually experienced, yet without a matrimonial bed; they headed households without a patriarchal husband. Widows have thus offered women's historians an instructive case study for exploring the possibilities and limits of women's agency. [3] Men and women in early modern Europe were equally intrigued by widows, casting them alternately as pious or lascivious, as poor women who deserved charity or as satanic women who deserved the stake. Lanza's extensive research adds considerably to the ongoing scholarship on widows, arguing that the early modern widow was "a *bricoleur*" who cobbled together a life in which she was "able to perform male and female work indiscriminately" (p. 161).

Lanza's claims cut through contemporaries' fantasies and representations of widows by recovering their lived experience. As Lanza states in her introduction, "Our understanding of widows and widowhood has been shaped more by assumptions about and representations of the era than by sustained consideration of widow's social roles and their everyday experiences" (p. 1). Lanza's social history discards representations to ask what tasks could widows of guild masters perform? How much control did they exert over their income, children, workshop, and remarriage? Lanza acknowledges her debt to Michel de Certeau and "practice theory," writing that "When examining those who did not explain their acts and their behavior, we are left with a study of what they did rather than what they said, with the 'tactics' articulated in the details of everyday life" (p. 13).[4] She explains that "Practice theory both acknowledges the power of social constraint and allows for a certain amount of agency in those who lived within a given set of social norms" (p.14). Lanza also draws inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu and Louis Assier-Andrieu, both of whom stress the malleability of the law as one component in a complex

field of activity. [5] In characteristically straight-forward prose, Lanza argues that early modern families, “understood and manipulated provisions of civil law to facilitate their particular goals” (p. 11).

From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris, like many scholarly books, delivers both more and less than its title promises. At its core the book presents a detailed social history of the lives of widows of guild masters in pre-revolutionary Paris. It does not address the condition of widows in other classes or outside of Paris, and the bulk of Lanza’s archival research is confined to the eighteenth century. As such, it is a useful book for social historians interested in women in eighteenth-century Parisian guilds and workshops. Although Lanza draws on the work of social and women’s historians of eighteenth-century France (such as Arlette Farge, Darrel Hafer, Clare Haru Crowston, and Cynthia Truant [6]), there is to my knowledge no general work in English or French that examines the experience of the widows of guild masters with Lanza’s attention to detail. Specialists in eighteenth-century women’s history and labor history will benefit greatly from her findings. Moreover, Lanza seeks to influence a broader audience of women’s historians with her bold claims about women’s relationship to gender, the economy of work, and law in early modern France. Her case study of eighteenth-century guild widows challenges several reigning orthodoxies about women’s relationship to the state, patriarchy, and the family economy. In doing so, it poses interesting questions for a broader audience of women’s historians, early modernists, and labor historians. With a relatively slim bibliography, slender footnotes, and restrained historiographic engagement with the work of other scholars, the editors of the Ashgate Press’s series on “Women and Gender the Early Modern World” may have hoped to publish a scholarly monograph accessible to a broader readership.

The first part of Lanza’s book explores the constraints that imposed barriers on widows’ lives. Yet even in this section, Lanza stresses widows’ strategies for power and survival. In chapter one, “Law in Early Modern France,” Lanza argues that despite “male-encoded norms” and a legal language that “parrots a patriarchal ideology,” early modern law acknowledged the practical need to empower widows (p. 38-39). Lanza cites the Edict on Second Marriages (1560) which acknowledged that widows perform “the double duty of mother and father” as evidence that “the family was at the foundation of the state even if it was headed by a woman” (p. 32). Here Lanza directly engages Sarah Hanley’s influential argument regarding the “family-state compact” and the creation of an early modern “marital-regime system of male governance, domestic and political, along parallel lines.” [7] Lanza argues that French laws and, more importantly, widows’ experiences, reveal that the French crown did not always enhance the power of the father at the expense of wives and children. Lanza states that Hanley’s analysis “privileges the language of a few pieces of legislation over both the overall choice of discourse of royal edicts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and, more importantly, practice within families that faced the very situations described by these laws. When placed in this far broader context, the linguistic implications of the Edict on Second Marriages, and the outcomes of the separation cases that Hanley uses to describe the application of the French Law Canon, appear more anomalous than descriptive of an entire system. Furthermore, if we look at widows as a group separate from women, married or single, a more nuanced picture of the status of women under the law surfaces” (pp. 37-38). While Lanza’s analysis of widows does not refute entirely Hanley’s concept of the “family-state compact,” it does at least suggest that the operation of Old Regime law on marriage and family was not altogether uniform in its defense of patriarchal authority. In the case of guilds, the importance of maintaining the artisanal workshop, even if run by a master’s widow, trumped patriarchal ideology.

Chapter two, “Widows and Religious Institutions,” offers a lengthy discussion of attitudes toward widows in Christian scriptures, early Christian teachings, and canon law. This chapter departs from the book’s otherwise tight focus on the lives of early modern artisan widows. Lanza even discounts the importance of this chapter on religious discourse by declaring that “in practical terms, religion had a rather weak influence on widow’s decisions” compared to civil law and guild statutes (p. 51). The most interesting aspect of the chapter is a discussion of widows’ testamentary practices, which Lanza reconstructs from records in the *minutier central* in the Archives Nationales. This research is only fully

interpreted in the book's final chapter, "The Trap of Poverty," in which Lanza argues that if some widows were poor, it was in large part because they gave away so much money to aid the poor. Here, Lanza acknowledges that the religious discourse that associated widows with the deserving poor in some cases constrained widows from maximizing their own economic self-interest. As Lanza writes, "By offering representation of poor suffering widows, by stressing how handicapped a woman was if she tried to survive alone, contemporary writers and moralists subtly pushed widows to hem in their independence out of fear" (p. 186).

Chapters three, four, and five, on women in the craft guilds, in the workshop, and on widow's patterns of remarriage, form the core of Lanza's research and argument. Because few guild records survive from eighteenth-century Paris, reconstructing the daily workings of the craft workshops is difficult, and tracing the experience of women is even more daunting. Despite these impediments, Lanza brings to life their experience by combining her own primary research with careful reading of the scholarship on guilds in classic works by René de Lespinasse and Alfred Franklin and more recent works by historians such as Michael Sonenscher, Steven Kaplan, and Cynthia Truant, among others. [8] Lanza uses the memoirs of journeyman glazier Jacques-Louis Ménétra (1738-1812) to especially good effect. [9] Ménétra's insights are precious because he not only worked for a number of widows, but, if we are to believe his boasts, slept with a large number of them as well. Lanza also makes extensive use of the vast archive of the royal court of the Châtelet (series Y at the AN) and deserves special praise for her research in the *minutier central*, interpreting probate records to reconstruct the material conditions of widow's lives by painstakingly tallying their liquid assets, *rentes*, and annuities. Specialists in the field may be disappointed to find that Lanza does not present her complete data in tables or appendices. Although particular individuals—the widow Quignon caught selling liqueur to her customers without a license or the widowed mother of six, Jacqueline Loulliart—pepper Lanza's narrative, details concerning individual lives are scant. Lanza's prose is clear and her analysis compelling; but hers is not a history characterized by thick description, dramatic characters, and narration.

In these central chapters, Lanza raises and then dismisses nearly every historiographical argument that widows were disadvantaged by guild life. In response to the contention that widows could not take on apprentices, she provides counter-examples. To the argument that widows wielded no power within the guild, she responds that widows' exclusion from voting or office holding was "less significant than it appears" since many guild masters were also excluded from voting and office-holding by the closed in-group nature of guild leadership (p. 119). To the argument that because women had not participated in the system of *compagnonnage*, they lacked familiarity with the artisanal sociability required for the shop work, Lanza responds, "When compared to the majority of masters in Parisian guilds, widows seem to be peers in terms of how they related to workers, the guilds, and their clients" (p. 120).

Throughout her argument, Lanza's insistence on artisan widow's empowerment through the guild drives her critique of two commonplaces of women's history: that women had difficulty functioning outside the "family economy" and that women's position as skilled workers generally declined in early modern Europe. Lanza particularly takes issue with Olwen Hufton's articulation of the "family economy" and her portrayal of the dire poverty of women who did not live under the umbrella of the family. Lanza concludes, "The idea of the family economy thus does not encompass the experience of widows. These findings also suggest that the shop itself, not the patriarch, constituted the central element of familial survival, at least for those of the artisanal ranks. We need, then, to consider the shop, rather than or alongside the workers, as a primary site of analysis. This alternate framework for envisioning the family's moral economy permits women to survive, and even thrive, so long as they operate a healthy enterprise. It also sheds light on ways that guilds, by embracing notions of the family as the foundation of a master's commerce, empowered women. An interpretation of guild structures and practices as manifestly patriarchal does not fully fit with the ways people worked within the corporate system" (p. 224). Lanza similarly takes issue with the broad chronology of the history of women's work outlined over the past thirty years by historians such as Olwen Hufton, Martha Howell, and Merry

Wiesner-Hanks, contending instead that women continued to find meaningful work in eighteenth-century guilds, not only in female guilds as seamstresses and linen-drapers, but also as wives and widows of guild masters in a variety of trades. [10] According to Lanza, the demolition of the guild structure during the French Revolution, not early modern capitalism, undercut women's power in the world of work, a point well-established by Daryl Hafer and Clare Haru Crowston, among others, in their studies of eighteenth-century women's work. [11]

Some readers will argue that Lanza's examples of widows' empowerment as *maîtresses* in the guilds can be more than offset by counter examples of powerless and impoverished widows. Lanza concedes that a widow held the title of master only temporarily and contingently: "She never became a master through a process and a ritual of conferral. As such, guild's policies on remarriage reiterated the temporary hold that a widow had on a mastership" (p. 102). Other readers may argue that Lanza makes her case for women's empowerment only by setting the bar so low that anything short of an outright prohibition of widows' work is cited as an opportunity for women. For example, Lanza acknowledges that guilds placed restrictions on widows, but finds a silver lining in the fact that "none of these restrictions pushed widows out of guilds altogether" (p. 115). Some historians will point out that Lanza's picture of widows' empowerment is not replicated in cities that lacked the Parisian guild structure and prominence of the Parisian clothing trades. Indeed, Lanza notes that the largest number of mistress widows worked in the clothing trades: eighty-five of the 396 master hosiers listed in one eighteenth-century document were widows and 26 percent of all embroiderers' shops were run by widows (p. 108). Lanza's account of women's empowerment focuses on the most privileged group of female workers, guild master's wives. Widows of journeymen workers who never attained the mastership, or the unmarried consorts of day laborers and un-skilled workers would surely tell a bleaker story.

Lanza's most ambitious goal is to prompt historians fundamentally to rethink how gender roles were constructed in early modern society and how these roles shaped women's behavior. She urges us to consider that in early modern France, "widows could be understood neither as women nor, certainly, as men. They stood as a group apart, one that their society allowed to act in ways that benefited them and their families, but also one that was barely tolerated and misunderstood. By examining practice along with representation, we can see that, in many respects, widows occupied the interstices of this culture, particularly with regard to gender ideals" (p. 8). Lanza's work may not persuade us fundamentally to reconceptualize eighteenth-century gender roles, given the limited scope of her study, but it certainly offers a thoughtful analysis of, in Lanza's words, "the limitations of patriarchy in practice" (p. 15) and a well-researched portrayal of the intersection of the family economy, the workshop, and the guild. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, and perhaps even Jacques-Louis Ménétra, might well have agreed with Lanza's assertion that the widows of master craftsmen "were arguably the most privileged women in French society" (p. 9).

NOTES

[1] Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam: 1783-1788), t. 9, 173.

[2] Lanza borrows the term "honorary man" from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Images and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

[3] The number of excellent histories of widows in early modern Europe are too numerous to cite here. Among the most influential recent studies are Natalie Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995) and Olwen Hufton, "Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," in Jan Bremmer and Lourens Van den Bosch, eds, *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood* (London:

Routledge, 1995). For a useful overview of the historiography on widows, see Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, eds., *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Longman, 1999).

[4] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans., Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[5] Louis Assier-Andrieu, *Le droit dans les sociétés humaines* (Paris : Nathan, 1996) and Pierre Bourdieu, in John B. Thompson, ed., *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

[6] Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power, and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Daryl Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Cynthia Truant "Le maîtrise d'une identité: Corporations féminines à Paris aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles," *Clio: Histoire, femmes & sociétés*, no. 3, automne-hiver 1996.

[7] Sarah Hanley, "Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Powers in Domestic and State Government, 1500-1800," *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997):27-52 and "Family and State in Early Modern France: The Marriage Pact," in Marilyn Boxer and Jean Quataert, eds., *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[8] René de Lespinasse, *Les métiers et corporations de Paris XIVe-XVIIIe siècle* (3 vols, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1886-97; Alfred Franklin, *Dictionnaire historique* (Paris: H. Welter, 1906); Michael Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Steven Kaplan, "Réflexions sur la police du monde du travail, 1700-1815," *Revue historique*, 261 (1979): 17-77; Cynthia Truant, *The Rites of Labor: Brotherhoods of Compagnonnage in Old and New Regime France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[9] Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of my Life*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Daniel Roche (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[10] Olwen Hufton, "Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies*, 9 (1975): 1-22; Martha Howell, *Women, Production, and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[11] Hafter, *Women at Work*; Crowston, *Fabricating Women*.

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