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Leah L. Chang, *Into Print: The Production of Female Authorship in Early Modern France*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009. 284 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$58.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-87413-053-9.

Review by Elizabeth Goldsmith, Boston University.

Why did early modern printers publish books that carried the name of a female author? This is the question that Leah Chang sets out to answer in her book *Into Print*. There is by now a substantial body of scholarship about women writers of the Renaissance and early modern period, especially on works written in French and English. Chang's study refers to this literature, deliberately and thoroughly, as she examines the publication history of the works of Louise Labé, Hélisenne de Crenne, Catherine and Madeleine des Roches, Marie de Gournay, and others. But she is careful to distinguish her own approach from that taken by most of the critical and historical scholarship on early women writers. She is not concerned with the "historical woman writer," but rather with the "female author," that is, the figure and function of the woman writer as constructed and shaped in these earliest texts in which she appeared in print. *Into Print* examines the complex ways in which female authorship emerged as a concept, a tool, and a popular image, through the interactions of publishers, printers, editors, and lastly, writers.

Chang is interested in material culture, hence the key phrase in her classically materialist subtitle, "the production of female authorship." She shares with us her own deep knowledge of all of the cultural and professional practices that went into early modern bookmaking: from page design to typeface, from manuscript to title page. Along the way we learn about the career decisions of early modern printers and the makings of Renaissance bestsellers. Her arguments about the existence of the female author as "a textual and material construct, rather than a purely historical and biographical entity," (p. 22) are based on a series of case studies that juxtapose careful readings of texts with close examinations of the volumes through which they first acquired a material reality.

Her opening chapter outlines a number of editorial practices of early modern printers, with particular reference to the printer Janot and his publication of the works of Hélisenne de Crenne, and the different printers of the poetry of Pernette du Guillet. One appreciates immediately to what extent this study offers a much broader history than its title suggests. She considers how textual authority was created through bookmaking and how a kind of ethics of good printing was promoted by collaborations between a number of writers and their printers, including Erasmus and his printer Aldus. The female author, she argues, is viewed as having an array of potential values within this emerging culture of the book, as a source of profit, as a novelty, and as a kind of authentic voice, especially when presented as the voice of a woman who has suffered and is dead.

The second chapter explores the jointly authored work of Madeleine and Catherine Des Roches, mother and daughter, known collectively as the "Dames Des Roches." Their writing continued to be revised and presented as an ongoing collaboration even after the death of

Madeleine. Catherine's collaboration with the Parisian printer L'Angelier was expanded to include a male coterie for the publication of a collection of scandalous poems, and then narrowed, later, to resituate Catherine's work in the context of a mother-daughter collaboration with the publication of her letters.

In chapter three, Chang discusses the work of the poet Louise Labé, whose existence as a historical writer has been challenged, recently, to the point of being denied altogether in a controversial study by Mireille Huchon.<sup>[1]</sup> Chang does not want to engage with this debate. The contested status of Louise Labé as a writer is in fact the perfect occasion for Chang to insist on her gesture of prying apart the figures of "author" and "writer". Louise Labé was a female author, she argues, even if she may not have been a female writer. She examines the multiple ways in which her writing was gendered, focusing on the intertwining of the classical figure of Sappho with that of Labé, in the design of a female poetic voice as well as in the choices made by printers and editors, from page layouts to the use of Greek typeface.

Chang's emphasis on the functions of female authorship is most apparent in this chapter and other sections where the historical identity of the writers under study is uncertain or challenged. In other parts of the study, such as the chapter on the Dames Des Roches and on Marie de Gournay, she cannot avoid bringing the life situation of the writers to bear on their existence as public, female authors. And Chang does this very well, however reticent she may be about it. She explores the intensity and imaginative range of the mother-daughter bond as it draws on the myth of Ceres and Proserpina, and as Catherine continued to reinvent and cling to it after her mother's death. Marie de Gournay's friendship with Montaigne was viewed and described by Gournay as a model for the ideal relationship between writer and editor, a relationship that is based on gender difference and thus distinct from, even counter to, Montaigne's own claims for perfect friendship. While the historical verifiability of this famous friendship is elusive, Chang delicately shows that Gournay's work as editor "weaves gender in as an integral thread in the fabric of producing the essays" (p. 209).

One comes to the end of the book with a rich appreciation of the strategic interest, for early modern printers as for writers, of producing a female-authored text. Chang's research is deep and meticulously presented. She draws into her conversation other critics who have explored the *oeuvre* of Renaissance women writers, while also insisting on her own critical side-stepping of the identity issues that have caused recent debate. There is a tension in this book, between, on the one hand, Chang's repeated assertions that early modern woman writers have all too often been simply "imagined" by their readers, and, on the other, her own sensitivity to the personal dramas that nourished the writing of many of the authors she studies. Along the way, the importance of that imaginative process, inevitably brought to the book by its readers, is somehow devalued.

This is, though, a peripheral point, and one that I make because I found the book compelling enough to make me want more of some of the insights that its author was intentionally reluctant to produce. As a reader I remain attached to the necessary process of imagining the historical writer. Leah Chang's book is nonetheless an extraordinary accomplishment. It fixes our attention on the multiple ways in which the interactions between author, printer, editor, and reader were orchestrated to produce a female-authored work in this era that first concerned itself with defining what a "gendered" text could be.

## NOTES

[1] Mireille Huchon, *Louise Labé: Une Créature de papier* (Genève: Droz, 2006).

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