
H-France Review Vol. 14 (February 2013), No. 31

Sara Harvey, *Entre Littérature galante et objet précieux: Etude et édition critique des Divers Portraits de Mademoiselle de Montpensier (1659)*. Paris: Hermann Editeurs, 2013. x + 545 pp. Figures, graphs, appendices, bibliography, and index. 50€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-7056-8692-5.

Review by Leah Chang, George Washington University.

In this first critical edition of Mademoiselle de Montpensier's *Divers portraits* (1659), Sara Harvey makes available to scholars a lesser-known work by Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier. Known as "La Grande Mademoiselle," Mademoiselle de Montpensier is most famous for her proximity to the throne during the reign of her cousin, Louis XIV, for her role in the *Fronde*, and for her *Mémoires* (first published in the eighteenth century). The *Divers portraits* are particularly distinctive as a collaborative work, for the 1659 volume contained literary portraits and self-portraits authored by both the duchess and those in her circle during the years 1653-1657. In an extensive introductory study that precedes the critical edition, Harvey immediately lays out the interpretive question that underpins an analysis of both the material volume and the historical circle that generated it. Why, she asks, was the book published as an ornate, limited edition *livre d'apparat* (akin to a highly decorative vanity publication) when the vogue for this kind of literary portrait would last only about three years in mid-century? And what is the scholarly interest for such a book today?

As Harvey outlines, the critical approaches to the *Divers Portraits* have generally taken two forms. On the one hand, literary historians have been interested in the *Divers portraits* principally as representative of the genre and form of the literary portrait it elaborates, its production among a circle of *mondain* participants, and its reception among a narrowly defined and elite audience. On the other hand, historians of the book have approached the *Divers portraits* as a "patrimonial object" (p. 1) whose historical value is largely found in its memorializing objectives. Harvey situates her presentation of the *Divers portraits* between these two critical perspectives. How, she asks, does the collection walk the line as witness both to an aristocratic, memorial endeavor and to the fleeting *mondain* taste for the literary portrait?

At the heart of the *Divers portraits*, Harvey argues, is Mademoiselle de Montpensier herself. When she was born in 1627, the birth of the future Louis XIV was still nine years away. As the only child of Louis XIII's younger brother, Gaston d'Orléans, and Marie de Bourbon, Mademoiselle de Montpensier was, as a young child, the scion of the Bourbon dynasty. Her prominent identity as the "first child of France" earned her international visibility, an exceptional education, and an enviable position as both object and patron of countless writers and artists. It was in this culturally dynamic milieu during her early years, Harvey shows, that Mademoiselle first became the object of numerous visual and literary portraits, which worked to celebrate the young duchess as the flower of French nobility within a genealogical narrative of royal dynasty, inheritance, and female heroic power. After the *Fronde* (1648-1653), the duchess's interest in the literary portrait took on a different dimension. During her period of exile, beginning in 1653, the composition of portraits served to entertain the duchess, but also to explore and construct the centrality of her own royal identity. By assembling the *Divers portraits* and printing the volume in limited edition with careful attention to its aesthetic design, Mademoiselle de Montpensier marked the creation and publication of the literary portrait as an exclusive affair in which she was the

central and directive figure. In its material production, then, the volume of the *Divers portraits* became both the medium and the material incarnation of the duchess's self-promotion.

Harvey divides her book into two distinct sections: an extensive, three-part introduction, followed by a critical edition of the 1659 text. The introduction is particularly notable and exhaustive in its detail. The three parts trace the production of the *Divers portraits* from its first publication to its reception *post-facto* through the nineteenth century. Part One covers the origins of the literary portrait, the intersections of the development of the genre as it was intertwined with Mademoiselle's personal history, the moral and political uses of the portrait, and the ways in which the duchess used the portrait to develop a personal mythology. Part Two analyzes aspects of the material production of the book, including paratextual material, frontispieces, the uses of titles and ornaments, the arrangements of the portraits within the collection, and dedications. The third and final part examines the reception of the *Divers portraits* from the seventeenth century onward. Harvey closely compares the *Divers portraits* to the *Recueil de portraits et éloges*, another portrait collection also published in 1659, with which the *Divers portraits* is often confused (the publication in the same year of both collections testifies to the popularity, if ephemeral, of the genre).

This comparison highlights the *précieux* backdrop that informed the composition and publication of literary portraits, and shows how the two collections followed two distinct modes: while Mademoiselle's *Divers portraits* was indeed inspired by the literary pastimes of the aristocracy, it also sought politically to glorify and memorialize that elite, while the *Recueil* belonged more properly to the mode of "gallant literature." After a discussion of seventeenth-century commentaries on the portrait, Harvey concludes the introduction by tracing the nineteenth-century reception of the *Divers portraits*, emphasizing in particular the ways in which its material form—as *livre d'apparat*—ensured its continued attention by historians of the book and paved the way for its historical reception as a memorializing endeavor, as distinct from the category of *littérature mondaine* in which the literary portrait could otherwise be inscribed.

Both the introduction and the critical edition of the text provide a goldmine of information and references for scholars specializing in Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the history of the book, or the *littérature galante* of the seventeenth century. Harvey supports her analysis with numerous graphs, appendices, illustrations, an extensive bibliography, and superb notation. This is not, however, a book for the non-specialist. The editorial apparatus around both the introduction and edition is occasionally overwhelming in its level of detail, and at times even risks posing some difficulties in navigation that might prove daunting for the student or cumbersome for the scholar for whom the *Divers portraits* is not the primary object of research (the critical edition, for instance, boasts both footnotes and endnotes for each portrait, as well as a biographical notice for each contributing seventeenth-century author). At the end of each section of her introduction, however, Harvey helpfully provides a cogent summary of her analysis, from which scholars can determine whether to study the longer section in greater detail.

The strength of Harvey's book is found in the relation she draws among the historical conditions in which the *Divers Portraits* was produced, the aesthetics of the literary portrait, and the features of the material book itself. If the reader occasionally risks getting lost in the details, Harvey successfully shows how the material apparatus of the *Divers portraits* was not simply a vehicle for the literary portrait but was, rather, an essential instrument in Mademoiselle de Montpensier's efforts to reclaim and promote her status as the most central figure in a culturally and politically influential circle of elites. The reader leaves the volume with a significant appreciation of the ways in which this seventeenth-century noblewoman commandeered the material production of the book—along with the genre of the portrait itself—for her own sociopolitical gains.

Leah Chang
George Washington University

lchang@gwu.edu

Copyright © 2013 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172