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Theresa Varney Kennedy, *Women's Deliberation: The Heroine in Early Modern French Women's Theater (1650-1750)*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018. xii + 201 pp. Figures, chapter endnotes, bibliography, and index. \$109.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1472484543.

Review by Ellen Welch, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The feminist scholarship that revolutionized ancien régime French literary studies in the 1980s and 1990s brought forgotten women writers into the critical spotlight.^[1] With time, this work has fundamentally altered the period's literary canon, such that it is now impossible to imagine an undergraduate course on seventeenth- and/or eighteenth-century French literature without Lafayette and d'Aulnoy, Graffigny and Charrière. Although texts by women writers now blend seamlessly into syllabi and bibliographies alongside those written by men, there remains a troubling distinction. The most commonly taught and studied female-authored works belong to prose genres—novels, fairy tales, memoirs, letters, conversations—while drama still often appears as an exclusively masculine domain. This inadvertent mapping of gender onto genre is a legacy of the centrality of prose (and of the novel in particular) in the first wave of pioneering studies of ancien régime women's writing. The importance of prose in these early studies reflects historical conditions that made it easier for women writers to make their mark in this literary mode in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As compared to, say, publishing a novel, writing for the theater required material and institutional resources that women had greater difficulty accessing. In addition to these historical considerations, literary-historical issues and the politics of canon formation surely also played a role in privileging prose in studies of women writers. Scholarship on prose fiction and paraliterary forms such as letters and memoirs, traditionally seen as minor genres in ancien régime literary studies, was relatively hospitable to new, female voices. Theater studies—ruled by such luminaries as Corneille, Molière, and Racine, Marivaux, Voltaire, and Beaumarchais—must have seemed more hostile terrain for this kind of feminist intervention.

This began to change in the 2000s with work by Perry Gethner, Aurore Evain, Henriette Goldwyn, and others to prepare modern editions of the work of women playwrights of the early modern era. The anthology *Théâtre des femmes de l'Ancien Régime*, now in four volumes with a fifth on the way, has made available a wealth of plays ranging from tragedies and comedies to ephemeral “proverbs,” along with scholarly introductions that illuminate the critical and popular success many women playwrights enjoyed in their lifetimes.^[2]

This important editorial work has facilitated a welcome wave of critical studies on women dramatists, including Theresa Varney Kennedy's new book, an outgrowth of her dissertation research. In fact, the recently published editions of female-authored plays provide the

chronologically broad, generically mixed corpus for this study. Like many of the groundbreaking projects of the 1980s and 1990s, Kennedy is interested in what distinguishes women's writing from that of their male counterparts. Her argument is that female playwrights took a different approach to characterizing female protagonists. Although some readers might disagree with the generalization that male dramatists' female characters were always passive or vengeful (pp. 3-4), this study of heroines in women's plays raises important questions about what constitutes heroic behavior when exhibited, created, and judged by a female perspective.[3] In four chapters, Kennedy sets out a typology of heroines into which she organizes some twenty female characters in plays by over a dozen dramatists including Pascal, Desjardins, Barbier, Bernard, Gomez, and Riccoboni. The first three categories—"irrational heroines," "dutiful heroines," and "bold and brazen heroines"—reflect early modern stereotypes that portrayed women as overly emotional or passive. Yet, as Kennedy shows, women playwrights recuperate these negative commonplaces about femininity by crafting heroines who garner compassion, display stoicism, or exercise agency. These proto-feminist re-imaginings of early modern feminine archetypes thus pave the way for the fourth, superior "type," the deliberative heroine, who combines what Kennedy views as the most positive traits afforded to female characters in early modern drama.

Chapter one, "Irrational Heroines," begins with a brief discussion of Racine's *Phèdre*, presented as the exemplar of a female lead character who is governed by her passions. In plays by women dramatists, Kennedy argues, instances of this type of heroine differ from the Racinian model in that their emotions often propel them to take bold action. In addition, these characters often admit to their flaws which, Kennedy observes, makes them worthy of the audience's pity. These general observations are discussed with reference to five characters in as many plays.[4] Following a similar pattern, chapter two, "Dutiful Heroines," takes Corneille's *Chimène* as the foil for the protagonists of the female-authored plays it considers. In both tragedies and comedies spanning 1637 to 1758, female characters "rise above their emotions to embrace duty, calling into question stereotypical female weakness" (p. 56).[5] Moreover, these characters' obedience is often depicted as an expression of exceptional bravery, especially in the cases of heroines who face death: Camma in Dorothee de Croy's *Cinnatus et Camma* (1637) and Saint Catherine in La Chapelle's martyr play (1663).

Chapter three, "Bold and Brazen Heroines" focuses on an excitingly eclectic group of plays produced outside the Parisian theater—in salons, in provincial cities such as Lyon, and in the Francophone diaspora.[6] These plays' romantically bold female characters may be punished for failing to conform to norms of modesty but, unlike the "irrational" heroine type, they do not necessarily regret their transgressions. From a modern point of view, then, these characters are laudable because they act with "little or no regard for patriarchal structures" (p. 129), yet disappointing because their boldness is motivated by romantic desire.

Finally, chapter four, "Deliberative Heroines," considers the kinds of heroines that, according to Kennedy, synthesize the best aspects of the three other types.[7] At once reasonable, tender-hearted, and active, these protagonists are given speeches that demonstrate the careful thought that guides their actions. Showing that these characters' approach to deliberation weighs emotion alongside apparently "reasonable" factors such as the good of the polity, Kennedy proposes that female playwrights "contest the separation of heart and mind" (p. 140) through their depiction of heroines. This interesting argument, perhaps the book's most exciting idea, leads the reader to retrospectively understand the first three chapters' "types" of heroines as limited by the traditional passion-versus-reason binary, where reason aligns with a privileging of duty (often to

the state) over personal, affective ties. Only by transcending the distinction between emotion and rationality can female characters achieve heroic status. This argument gains clarity in the conclusion through an extended analysis of Graffigny's *La Réunion du bon sens et de l'esprit* (1733), an allegorical play in which three young women are led by Madame Reason to find a kind of mental equilibrium that unites wisdom and passion. Graffigny thus "redefine[s] Enlightenment reason so that it would be accessible to women" (p. 176), paralleling the way other female playwrights redefine heroism to include feminine character traits.

Women's Deliberation raises important questions about female versus male heroism, both in the early modern period and in our own time. In its ambitious attempt to address these questions in relation to a very large number of female-authored texts, the book sacrifices a degree of nuance in its arguments. The book is rigorously organized, with each chapter adhering to a consistent template: an introduction describing the type of heroine it explores, followed by short discussions of the plays. Each play is considered separately, a concise plot summary and analysis preceded by discrete sections on its performance history and historical and literary source material. Although clear and efficient, the book's schematic structure often ends up treating individual heroines as variations on a theme, diminishing the distinctions among characters appearing in tragedies versus comedies, or earlier or later moments in the book's century-long period of focus. The heterogeneity of each chapter's corpus provokes further questions. For example, how might female heroism operate differently in different genres? Although Kennedy references Aristotle's recommendations for the tragic character, it would be interesting to develop how heroines in women's tragedies might fulfill the function of the tragic figure as understood by the *Poetics'* early modern interpreters. Meanwhile, the analysis of comedic dramatists' manipulation of feminine stereotypes could be extended by considering it in light of early modern comedy's evolving reliance on character types. *Women's Deliberation* suggests many avenues for future research.

Women's Deliberation will be most valuable as a comprehensive English-language introduction to the work of several women dramatists who deserve more critical attention. Its structure will allow readers to use the book as a reference and, most important, will encourage instructors to assign relevant sections to students to accompany their reading of the plays. Indeed, Kennedy offers a valuable framework through which these female-authored plays might be incorporated in undergraduate courses by exploring resonances between the heroines of early modern theater and those who appear on our own screens, in Disney films and superhero movies, and in the pages of contemporary young adult novels. In charting the emergence of "a multi-faceted, modern protagonist more capable of earning our esteem" (p. 141), *Women's Deliberation* discovers in early modern theater an origin story for a "modern-day" ideal of women's heroism. As such, Kennedy's clearly written and accessible book will do a great deal to advance the on-going project of diversifying the ancien régime French literary canon.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Faith Beasley, *Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth-Century France* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), Michèle Longino, *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), Joan Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), Nancy K. Miller, *French Dressing: Women, Men, and Ancien Régime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1995),

Nathalie Grande, *Stratégies de romanicières, de Clélie à La princesse de Clèves (1654-1678)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), and, a bit later, Heidi Bostic, *The Fiction of Enlightenment: Women of Reason in the French Eighteenth Century* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010).

[2] Aurore Evain, Perry Gethner, Henriette Goldwyn, et al., *Théâtre des femmes de l'Ancien Régime*, 4 vols. (Saint Etienne: Publications de l'université de Saint-Etienne, 2006-2011/Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014-2017). See also Perry Gethner's pioneering editions and translations which appeared from the mid-1990s: *Femmes dramaturges en France (1650-1750): Pièces choisies*, 2 vols. (Paris and Seattle: Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature, 1993), *Challenges to Traditional Authority: Plays by French Women Authors, 1650-1700* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015), and *The Lunatic Lover and Other Plays by French Women of the 17th & 18th Centuries* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

[3] For studies of heroines in male-authored plays of the ancien régime, see Emy Batache-Watt, *Profil des héroïnes raciniennes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976), Mary Jo Muratore, *The Evolution of the Corneillian Heroine* (Madrid: Studia Humanitatis, 1982) and *Expirer au féminin: Narratives of Female Dissolution in French Classical Texts* (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2003), Constant Venesoen, *Corneille apprenti féministe de Mélite au Cid* (Paris : Lettres Modernes, 1986), Josephine Schmidt, *If there are no more heroes, there are heroines: A Feminist Critique of Corneille's Heroines, 1637-1643* (Lanham, MD : University Press of America, 1987), Claire Carlin, *Women Reading Corneille: Feminist Psychocriticisms of Le Cid* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), Véronique Desnain, *Hidden Tragedies: Social Construction of Gender in Racine* (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2002), and Vincent Dupuis, *Le tragique et le féminin: Essai sur la poésie française de la tragédie, 1553-1663* (Paris: Classiques Garmier, 2015).

[4] The heroines considered in this chapter are Roxelane in Marie-Anne Mancini's *Mustapha et Zéangir* (1705), the title character of Marie-Anne Barbier's *Tomiris* (1707), Orithie in Anne Marie Du Boccage's *Les Amazones* (1749), Orphise in Françoise Thérèse Aumerle de Saint-Phalier's *La Rivale confidente* (1752), and Marsidie, Reine des Cimbres, in Madeleine-Angélique de Gomez's play of that name (1724).

[5] This chapter analyzes Dorothee de Croy's *Cinnatus et Camma* (1637), Marie-Catherine Desjardins-Villedieu's *Nitétis* (1663), La Chapelle's *L'Illustre philosophe* (1663), Marie-Anne Barbier's *Cornélie, mère des Gracques* (1703), Geneviève Gillot de Saintonges's *Giselle* (1714), and Françoise de Graffigny's *La fille d'Aristide* (1758).

[6] An editorial error identifies the plays as originating in "venues outside France" although some were written and performed in Lyon (p. 99). The plays considered in this chapter include Catherine Duran's *Comédies en proverbes* (1699), Françoise Pascal's *Agathonphile martyr* (1655), Marguerite-Jeanne de Staal's *La Mode* (1747), Graffigny's *Phaza* (1748), and Huau's *Le Caprice de l'Amour* (1739).

[7] These heroines include the title character of Catherine Bernard's *Laodamie, reine d'Epire* (1689), Arrie in Marie-Anne Barbier's *Arrie et Pétus* (1702), Sémiramis in Gomez's play of that name (1707), Graffigny's *Cénie* (1750), and Babet in Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni's *Les Caquets* (1761).

Ellen R. Welch
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
erwelch@email.unc.edu

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