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Linda Garbaye, ed. *Le rôle des femmes dans les sociétés américaine et européenne au XVIIIe siècle: représentations et pratiques / Women's Role in 18th-Century American and European Societies: Representations and Practices*. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2017. 82 pp. €7.50 (pdf). ISBN (pdf): 978-2-84516-778-0; €7.50 (eb). ISBN (eb): 978-2-84516-779-7.

Review by Nina Kushner, Clark University.

In the introduction to her edited volume, *Le rôle des femmes dans les sociétés américaine et européenne au XVIIIe siècle: représentations et pratiques*, Linda Garbaye writes that, “Cet ouvrage vise à explorer cette histoire faite à la fois de subordination persistante à l’ordre masculin et de stratégies de prise de parole et d’influence dans des espaces de liberté et de reconnaissance limités” (p. 6). How women manipulated the constraints to which they were subject—to act, to speak, to influence others, in short, to have agency—is a central question in the field of women and gender studies today. It is one that matters because it lays bare not only how society was gendered but also exposes the most basic operations of power. The six articles in this volume engage with this theme in different ways and to varying degrees. Some offer new research. Others are summaries of existing scholarship, but are useful for the comparative perspective they bring to the project and for introducing French readers to women’s (and sometimes gender) history outside of France. In fact, only one of the essays focuses on France, the rest on Britain and what became United States. The essays are highly accessible, with titles and abstracts (though not articles) in both French and English. The volume is handsomely produced and appears to be aimed at an undergraduate or general audience.

In their respective essays, Christophe Regina and Augustin Habran make compelling arguments showing how women manipulated gender constructs and how in doing so they participated in certain forms of politics, from the personal to the local to the regional. Regina, in his essay on cases brought by women to the sénéchaussée courts of Marseille, taps what has been a profitable vein of inquiry, one fruitfully mined by Arlette Farge beginning most notably with the 1986 publication *La vie fragile* and carrying through a number of other works.^[1] Like Farge, Regina examines how women worked the justice system to affect power relations in their communities and maintain their honor. Focusing primarily on cases of insult, Regina shows that women followed a fairly standard script which played on and with constructions of gender and female honor: women were insulted publicly while going about honest business; they portrayed themselves as good women and mothers; they painted their attackers as the opposite—whores, crazy women, incarnates of fury. Through his analysis of these trials, Regina argues that the “rhétorique féminine de la plainte” is not just a strategy that allowed women to preserve their

honor and settle scores (p. 22). It also allowed women to participate in an emerging public sphere by manipulating some of the very constructs designed to exclude them. Each essay in this volume is ten pages, and Regina accomplishes a great deal in his. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting had Regina had the time to dig a little deeper, consider whether there were significant changes over time as gender lines hardened and a domestic sphere emerged more fully, and determine how his findings fit into the body of research on this subject.[2]

Augustin Habran's essay looks at a very different population—First Nation women of what eventually became the southeastern United States. He argues that these women played crucial roles in helping their nations maintain sovereignty as they weathered the economic and social impact of colonialism and later became the subject of federal oversight in the early Republic. Through these processes, First Nation women helped to define “Indianness.” This happened in two stages. Traditionally, these First Nation women held important economic and religious, as well as political and even military, roles. The latter two contracted in the colonial period as British colonists preferred to deal with men. Yet, Habran argues, First Nation men were frequently away fighting wars or hunting for the furs so central to the colonial economy, leaving women in charge of providing food and sustaining religious life. These activities brought stability to and reinforced female control over their own communities. In fulfilling these essential religious and domestic roles, First Nation women “played” (*jouer*) with gender constructs, fitting colonialist expectations of women, while maintaining their influence and their nation's sovereignty (p. 31). In the second stage, the new Republic implemented a “civilizing program” that aimed to turn members of the First Nations into citizen farmers. First Nation women led a process of “resistance by acculturation” (p. 31).[3] It was women, not men, argues Habran, who primarily dealt with federal agents and learned various farming techniques that they later modified according to their culture. This participation, often as part of racially mixed families, allowed these women to define new notions of “Indianness” that helped Nations maintain their sovereignty. Habran's argument is interesting, complicated, and offers much to unpack in a few pages. Yet, one wonders about subjectivity. Did these women see themselves as engaging in Nation saving activities, and, as such, continuing to hold high status?

Marie-Laure Massei-Chamayou and Arlette Frund enter the conversation by considering how women's writing was agentic and critiqued gender (and racial) constructs, both by its very production and by its content. In both essays, these established literary scholars provide overviews of arguments that they, and others, have developed elsewhere.[4] Massei-Chamayou explores how Jane Austen assessed, critiqued, and at times subverted gender conventions through plot and character development in her novels. Austen's female characters were forced to navigate a highly landscaped terrain, one shaped by legal and social convention, the failure of male characters on whom these female characters were largely dependent, and by the necessity that marriage—the route to financial and social security—be based on love. Austen further subverted gender convention, Massei-Chamayou notes, by writing female protagonists who refused to embody the characteristics increasingly naturalized in women: “La romanière privilège des héroïnes faisant preuve de bon sens et d'un discours rationnel, donc d'une maîtrise du langage capable de contrecarrer les exagérations rhétoriques indissociables du culte de la sensibilité” (p. 43). Massei-Chamayou also considers the significance of Austen taking up the pen at all, arguing that female authors had to defy conventions laid out in proscriptive literature to publish. Yet, it was only in doing so that they could create different kinds of female characters that challenged these conventions. Arlette Frund takes up the question of the nature of the relationship of authorship, content, and gender and rehearses the well-established biography of

Phillis Wheatley, a slave owned by the Boston Wheatley family who became an internationally renowned poet. Frund methodically works through the major events of Wheatley's life in tandem with an exposition of her writing, ultimately showing how Wheatley's letters and poetry helped to map "a cultural and political discourse in Colonial America and the transatlantic world of letters" (p. 47). Frund's sensitive readings of Wheatley reveal the ways in which the author wove multiple identities, especially those of an African woman who was kidnapped and enslaved, into her work, from evincing longing and creating a community of belonging to protesting enslavement. In examining the reception of both Wheatley's work and Wheatley herself, Frund situates her in an ongoing iterative process of identity formation. Together, Frund and Masseur-Chamayou nudge the discussion away from the explorations of manipulations of gender constructs to consider what it meant for women to be part of Anglo-American intellectual world.

The chapters by Jacques Carré and Anne-Claire Faucquez focus on very different groups of women: poor women engaged as temporary caregivers in London in the case of Carré, and female slave holders eighteenth-century New York for Faucquez. Carré, who recently published an article about paid nurses in eighteenth-century London hospitals, took advantage of a newly developed database of trials in the Old Bailey to explore everyday life for temporary nurses: they were very poor, single or widowed, often hired out of the poor house, worked for short periods of time, and formed no or few connections to their charges.[5] Those in the courts were most commonly accused of robbing their employers or others in the neighborhood, though some were also accused of more serious crimes like infanticide. The cases were brought by wealthier victims; most defendants did little to defend themselves. When they did provide defenses, these women often blamed poverty and coercion or claimed to have been framed. Caregivers were acquitted at lower rates than women in general. Carré squeezes a lot of material out of the database. But one still wonders about the meaning of some of his evidence, particularly as it relates to agency and gender. For example, how did being female shape the charges, the rate of acquittal, and the language in these trials? Carré notes, in one instance, that domestic theft--the most common accusation--was considered serious because it threatened the patriarchal family, a pillar of society (p. 64). What did it mean, then, if such an attack came from a woman?

Citing a dearth of research on women as slave holders in the American North, Anne-Claire Faucquez reports on female slave holders in New York City. Through a rich mining of census data read against other sources, Faucquez found that women across the economic spectrum held slaves, and that these slaves engaged in a wide variety of activities, from being agricultural slaves on larger properties to working alongside their impoverished owners in household tasks. Faucquez discusses the complexity for women of owning slaves. While male slave holders could easily fulfilled the paternalist role expected of them, female slave holders were supposed to embody a maternal role, which required that they both be in charge of their household and have close ties to their slaves. While some female slave holders functioned as stand-in mothers for enslaved children, Faucquez found that women were no less likely than male slave holders to protect, manumit, educate or leave goods to their slaves. As with all the other essays, Faucquez had much to cover in her ten pages. Yet questions, of course, remain, such as how exactly slave holding affected social status for women--a subject Faucquez hinted at but did not have the space to fully explore--and whether slave holding gave them more access to other kinds of rights and other forms of social power.

While the individual essays in this volume have much to offer, its framework gives pause. As anyone who has ever tried can easily attest, it is difficult to frame edited collections. Nevertheless,

framing matters enormously. The title promises that the volume will consider women's role—as a singular item—in society. Linda Garbaye softens the title's claim by reminding us that we must think of women's roles (plural), and the category's new iteration, the interdisciplinary “condition des femmes” (p. 5). But this framing still suggests a fully formed society in which half of the population played a limited number of parts, whose parameters we—as good positivists—just have to discover. Implicit in the construct of “role” as a category of analysis, then, is the idea that women were passive: objects of discourses, desire, and bureaucratic practice. This approach obfuscates gender, the category of analysis tied most intimately with questions of agency and the one that historians employ to understand how larger systems were built, and thus how power operates. Equally important, this approach also assumes that sex was the most important characteristic defining one's experience in the past, that it eclipsed all other categories such as rank, race, or religion. This was simply not the case. A female noble, for example, certainly had more in common with a male noble than with a street prostitute, despite the fact that both were women. Women are not a cohesive group in the way imagined by such an approach.

Like the framing, Garbaye's conclusion is also problematic. Focusing on emancipation, the conclusion makes two major claims: 1) that women in the eighteenth century had “rencontrent plus de possibilités d'exprimer des revendications” and that 2) “L'essentiel est que l'époque des batailles culturelles, politiques, et des mobilisations individuelles et collectives pour l'obtention de leurs droits, et en particulier du droit de vote, qui a duré ensuite jusqu'au milieu du xxe siècle, avait commencé” (p. 79). These claims do not stand up to scrutiny and are not the subject of the volume's essays. There is a substantial body of work showing that women in the eighteenth century were politically, culturally, and economically active. But this work is situated in a larger narrative in which women faced a steady contraction of opportunity from the high middle ages through the early nineteenth century.^[6] With the exception of some work on the history of feminism (which this volume does not consider), few historians cite the eighteenth century as a beginning, however tentative, of a better world for women in the context of political or civil rights, as it was for many white men. Just the opposite: gender lines hardened; African-American women remained enslaved; and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Napoleonic code erased women's legal personalities. The periodization of women's and gender history is different from that of other fields of history. So are its central questions.

If we move past the framing, we are left with six accessible pieces concerning different women and groups of women across the Atlantic that, while not always offering new findings, are interesting to read against each other. They speak both to overarching constraints that women faced and strategies for manipulating those constraints.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Linda Garbaye, “Introduction”

Christophe Regina, “Les femmes créatrices d'une norme urbaine ? Des usages de la justice et de leurs effets sur la structuration des sociabilités à Marseille au XVIIIe siècle / Women and the Regulation of Urban Spaces: Sociability and the Use of the Judicial System in 18th-Century Marseille”

Augustin Habran, “Les Amérindiennes de l'ère coloniale au ‘Programme de

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Marie-Laure Massei-Chamayou, "La représentation du rôle des femmes dans les romans de Jane Austen: entre négociation, subversion et émancipation / Jane Austen's Representation of the Roles of Women: between Negotiation, Subversion, and Emancipation"

Arlette Frund, "Phillis Wheatley, écriture de soi dans l'Histoire / Phillis Wheatley: Writing Herself into History"

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Linda Garbaye, "Conclusion"

NOTES

[1] Arlette Farge, *La vie fragile: violence, pouvoirs et solidarité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1986).

[2] See, for example, Nicolae Castan, "Criminelle," in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, eds., *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, vol. 3: *XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Plon, 1991); Yves Castan, *Honnêteté et Relations Sociales en Languedoc (1715-1780)* (Paris: Plon, 1974); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); David Garrioch, *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris 1740-1790* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Roderick Phillips, "Women, Neighborhood, and Family in the Late Eighteenth Century," *French Historical Studies* 18, no.1 (1993): 1-12; Hugues Lecharny, "L'injure à Paris au XVIIIe siècle. Un aspect de la violence au quotidien," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 36, no.4 (1989): 559-585; Suzannah Lipscomb "Crossing Boundaries: Women's Gossip, Insults and Violence in Sixteenth-Century France," *French History* 24, no.4 (2011): 408-426.

[3] Habran uses the work of Élise Marienstras, *La Résistance indienne aux États-Unis* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014 [1980]), 118-129. See footnote 25, page 31.

[4] Among other works see Marie-Laure Massei-Chamayou, *La représentation de l'argent dans les romans de Jane Austen: L'être et l'avoir* (Des idées et des femmes) (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2012) and Arlette Frund, *Les politiques du sensible dans le monde afro-américain et diasporique* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2015).

[5] Jacques Carré, "Service without Responsibility: Hospital Nurses in 18th-Century Britain," in *The Invisible Woman: Women's Work in 18th-Century Britain*, ed. Isabelle Baudino, Jacques Carré and Cécile Révauger (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 89-100.

[6] Among many examples please see Nina Kushner and Daryl Hafter, eds. *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

Nina Kushner
Clark University
nkushner@clarku.edu

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