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Fayçal Falaky and Reginald McGinnis, eds., *Modes of Play in Eighteenth-Century France*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2022. 216 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, and index. \$130.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9-78-1684483419; \$39.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1684483402.

Review by Gemma Tidman, Queen Mary, University of London.

Originating from a session at the 2018 American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference, this engaging and timely collection of essays offers a smorgasbord of new work on the history of play in France, from one end of the long eighteenth century to the other. The volume's title foregrounds one of its key strengths, namely, its exploration of a range of modes of play, across fairy tales, material culture, novels, theatre, opera, and other socio-cultural practices. The concise introduction from editors, Fayçal Falaky and Reginald McGinnis, cites a number of sources to justify the focus on eighteenth-century France. The editors note, for instance, the large number of French-language treatises on play, games and gambling that appeared between 1685 and 1709, and they refer to both recent and classic work in the field of game studies which has recognised the particular prevalence of the ludic in eighteenth-century culture.^[1] The volume sets out to remind readers of the "prominence of play throughout the eighteenth century" (p. 4), as well as to show how play--across cultural forms--was often used as a tool to rethink, reshape, or critically represent contemporary society. It more than delivers on these aims.

Modes of Play lends support to the conclusions of recent single-authored studies that have highlighted the serious political, social, and cultural stakes of play (and related concepts) in eighteenth-century France.^[2] It also joins an existing body of influential edited collections and special issues on the broad themes of play and games in early modern, and especially eighteenth-century, France.^[3] Two main characteristics, however, seem to me to distinguish this volume from existing ones and to give it a richly-deserved place in this bibliography. The first is the interdisciplinary, cross-modal focus not just between essays, but within many of the essays themselves. This permits a detailed understanding of the way in which different forms of play interacted with one another, and to what ends. Material games are shown to intersect with word play; artisan-made toys with fairy tales; and even video games with the *théâtre de la foire* (a fusion brought about by a current research project). The second defining feature of this volume is its apparent interest--though not a stated aim--in giving air-time to understudied practices of play. While some readers might find surprising the absence of contributions on "sporting cultures" or the relatively limited attention given to the visual arts (profoundly playful in this period), perhaps such modes of play--addressed by recent scholarly work--have been sidelined for the benefit of practices more often left on the margins: opera, material games, journalistic campaigns, little-

known novels, and society theatre, to name a few.^[4] Whatever the reason for this focus, the result is a valuable collection that expands the scope of scholarship on the history of early modern French play.

The volume is not formally divided into parts, but the introduction explains that the first three chapters explore different “modes of play, from the material to the textual” (p. 5); chapters four and five consider “the political dimension of the ludic” (p. 5) as it featured in novels; while the five following chapters all relate to performance in some way. The volume therefore gives some consideration to material culture, more to literary play, and most to play as performance. Although somewhat uneven, this weighting has the merit of reflecting the current focus of research being conducted in this area of French cultural history. Readers are thus given a useful sense of the current state of the field: the projects underway, and the areas which merit greater attention.

Rori Bloom opens the first set of chapters with a carefully contextualised analysis of the differences between Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy’s and Henriette-Julie de Murat’s respective portrayals of play—and especially dolls—in their fairy tales. D’Aulnoy highlights the artisanal skill involved in making these crafted objects of beauty and amusement (which parallel her own tales). Yet, for Murat, the doll is a symbol that allows her to criticise the practice of turning young girls into the playthings of men and of society when they are forced to become child brides. Jean-Alexandre Perras continues these interdisciplinary reflexions to show how the eighteenth-century crazes for *bilboquet* (“cup and ball”) and *calembours* (“puns”)—material games and word games—were intertwined. In a wide-ranging piece that incorporates analysis of visual art, songs, and press intervention, Perras argues that both forms of play belong to the same ancien régime world of aristocratic, leisured frivolity. Zeina Hakim brings this set of essays to a close with a new reading of Alain-René Lesage’s *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane*. Drawing on much textual evidence, Hakim shows that Lesage engages in a constantly dialogic narrative game with the reader, in which he mocks conventional literary practices but nonetheless seeks “to reconcile critical awareness with the pleasure of stories” (p. 59).

The next two chapters, by Masano Yamashita and Erika Mandarino, explore how novelists write play—particularly games of chance—into their texts, using play to variously criticise or re-imagine society. Focusing on Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut* and *Cleveland*, Yamashita shows how *jeux de hasard* such as card games and the drawing of lots are presented as double-edged swords, which can set right arbitrary inequalities (especially if players cheat...) just as they can sow disorder. Helpful contextualisation reminds readers that Prévost drew on real-life precedents, such as the use of funds gathered from gambling houses and lotteries to assist the poor. *Alea* in games, Yamashita reminds us, was ironically harnessed to reduce *alea* in society. Mandarino’s chapter considers both how play is a feature of the lives of the Mercurians in the Chevalier de Béthune’s utopian fiction, the *Relation du monde de Mercure*, and how the novel itself is “an example of pure play” (p. 94). While the Mercurians gain pleasure from the infinite possibilities opened up by play on their planet, Béthune similarly seems to have written this playful text (which has no conclusion, and was not published during his lifetime) for pleasure alone. Like Mandarino’s chapter, many of the chapters in this collection raise the question of the difference between representations of play in literary or other forms of culture, and cultural objects *as* play. Where are the points of contact between these two? Do different effects tend to be produced by each? These are questions the editors’ introduction might have addressed more explicitly, but which are nonetheless usefully opened up for the reader to consider.

The next four chapters primarily address performance as play, but also, on occasion, play as portrayed *in* performances. Katharine Hargrave does both in her consideration of the political effects of orientalisating imitation games in two operas set in Persia: Jean-Philippe Rameau and Louis de Cahusac's *Zoroastre* and Antonio Salieri and Pierre Beaumarchais's *Tarare*. Countering Roger Caillois's claim that play is essentially unproductive, and making useful comparisons with Montesquieu's practice in the *Lettres persanes*, Hargrave argues that these operas "play with Orientalist fantasy as a smoke screen to convey transgressive socio-political ideologies" (p. 98).^[5] *Turquerie* on the operatic stage, in these cases at least, is not a superficial spectacle, but encourages spectators to question their own social world. Maria Teodora Comsa turns to the aristocratic fashion for private *théâtre de société*, in which amateur actors would play for a select audience of friends and acquaintances. While this might seem to be another frivolous past time, Comsa's study of Casanova's account of one such private performance, and of a *proverbe dramatique* penned for society stages by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle, shows its numerous weighty effects. Such private performances allowed players to caricature (and momentarily escape) the social acting required of them in daily life, and they helped to unify the society in question through laughter.

In chapters eight and nine, Annelle Curulla and Yann Robert consider from different angles the practice of performance during the Revolutionary years. Curulla focuses on what she calls "profane masquerades": the carnivalesque practice of non-ecclesiastics performing as Catholics. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's thinking on play and profanation and analysing a wide range of sources (theatrical depictions, visual art, and official and unofficial accounts), Curulla theorises these masquerades as acts which deactivate the power of the sacred. Curulla shows how, in the masquerades of 1793, Revolutionaries used play to further France's dechristianisation. While Curulla underscores the Revolutionary politicisation of play, Robert considers how France began to row back from this in 1797, when some called for topical theatre to give way to plays that were just that: play. Robert uncovers the details of, first, a press campaign that sought to revive the appreciation of plays on aesthetic grounds (which involved, remarkably, the return of booing); and, second, a debate in the Council of Five Hundred and the Council of Ancients, which shows authorities to have been wary of *pièces de circonstance*, considered too ripe for misinterpretation, and too particular (rather than general) in the political lessons they offered.

Jeffrey M. Leichman closes the collection with a chapter that is unique in treating play not just as an object of study, but also as a methodology. He discusses the insights being gained from a current video game project, VESPACE (the Virtual Early Modern Spectacles and Publics, Active and Collaborative Environment). This project is developing a virtual reality experience that models the Foire Saint-Germain, allowing players to step (back) into this most prestigious eighteenth-century Parisian *théâtre de la foire*. Leichman lucidly discusses the design principles, the prototype, and both the possibilities and potential pitfalls of this VR game, which promises to be "a laboratory for future forms of history writing" (p. 179). The volume thus concludes on this ambitious, future-oriented note, gesturing to the new forms of historical narrative that play might allow scholars to construct.

In sum, *Modes of Play* opens up a host of promising research avenues and raises intriguing questions. By revealing new insights into the place of play in the eighteenth-century French zeitgeist, readers are ultimately brought to reflect upon its place in the zeitgeist of our own age. What might unite or divide societies swept up by crazes for *turquerie*, *bilboquet*, or redistributive

lotteries, on the one hand; for *Duolingo*, *Wordle*, or *Squid Game*, on the other? That is something this reader, at least, is left pondering. An affordable, enjoyable and stimulating collection, this volume will be of much interest to students and scholars alike. It will undoubtedly spur new scholarly work on the history of play which, as the editors and contributors so convincingly show, is no trivial matter.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Fayçal Falaky and Reginald McGinnis, "Introduction"

Rori Bloom, "Playing with Dolls in Old Regime Fairy Tales"

Jean-Alexandre Perras, "The Morality of Bilboquet, or the Equivocations of Language"

Zeina Hakim, "Fiction as Play: Rhetorical Subversion in Alain-René Lesage's *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillanè*"

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Yann Robert, "The Return of Play, or the End of Revolutionary Theater"

Jeffrey M. Leichman, "Video Games as Cultural History: Procedural Narrative and the Eighteenth-Century Fair Theater"

NOTES

[1] Key points of reference, respectively, are Frans Märyä, *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture* (London: SAGE, 2008), p. 43; Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 173, 186.

[2] For instance, Antoine de Baecque, *Les Éclats du rire: La Culture des rieurs au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 2000); Élisabeth Belmas, *Jouer autrefois. Essai sur le jeu dans la France moderne (XVI-XVIII^e siècle)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2006); Timothée Léchet, "La poésie ludique et les règles de la transgression," *Versants* 65/1 (2018): 81-98; Jean-Alexandre Perras, "Le 'Siècle de la frivolité': sur l'invention d'un lieu commun au XVIII^e siècle," *Early Modern French Studies* 37/1 (2015): 64-74; Jennifer Tsien, *The Bad Taste of Others: Judging Literary Value in Eighteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2012), especially chapter 5.

[3] See “Game, Play, Literature,” special issue of *Yale French Studies*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann, 41 (1968); *Le Jeu au 18^e siècle. Colloque du Centre Aixois d’Études et de Recherches sur le 18^e siècle (30 avril, 1er et 2 mai 1971)* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1976); Edward Nye, ed., *Games in the Eighteenth Century SVEC* 2000/08 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000); Éric Francalanza, ed., *La Littérature et le jeu du XVII^e siècle à nos jours* (Bordeaux: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2004).

[4] For just two examples of recent work on sociable--often ludic--sporting practices in this period, and on playful visual art, see Daniel O’Quinn and Alexis Tadié, eds., *Sporting Cultures, 1650–1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); and Jennifer Milam, *Fragonard’s Playful Paintings: Visual Games in Rococo Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

[5] For Caillois’s claim, see Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 10.

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