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Joan DeJean, Ed. and trans. *Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier. Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle.* University of Chicago Press, 2002. xxix + 86 pp. Bibliography and index. \$14.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-226-53492-8.

Marcelle Maistre Welch, Intro and Ed., Trans. Vivien Bosley. *François Poullain de la Barre. Three Cartesian Feminist Treatises.* University of Chicago Press, 2002. xxvii + 339 pp. Bibliography and index. \$22.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-226-67654-4.

Review by Carolyn Lougee Chappell, Stanford University.

These two new volumes in the invaluable series “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe” afford new opportunities for both teaching and research in the domain of seventeenth-century feminist thought.

Against Marriage is a set of 8 letters exchanged in 1660-61 between La Grande Mademoiselle and Madame de Motteville. Found by Joan DeJean in a seventeenth-century manuscript newly acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and offered here as bilingual texts (the original and the editor's English translation on facing pages), this correspondence offers a unique *entrée* into *mondain* culture in the post-Fronde transition to Louis XIV's personal rule. Better, perhaps, than any other single document of the period, it engages modern readers in the feminist literature of mid-century and makes them take seriously a discourse on women's choices and women's dreams that is too easily dismissed as *précieuse* posturing.

Mademoiselle initiated the exchange of letters at Saint-Jean-de-Luz in May 1660. At the very moment when the king's wedding was demonstrating the power of marriage—to end wars, to break up romance (with Marie Mancini), to ally dynasties, to rally political support—Mademoiselle confides her longing for a world without marriage, indeed without gallantry and romantic love altogether. [1] “I would like us to...imitate what we have read in *L'Astrée* though without amorous pursuit” (p. 33). She sketches a pastoral idyll to which men and women repair from the court by choice while maintaining relations with it, and in which they live in isolated houses but socialize frequently, savor the solitary pleasures of reading and writing but occasionally play at shepherds, enjoy lives of privilege but, as good Christians, tend to the charitable needs of the destitute and ill among their peasants. To complete the spectrum of lifestyle alternatives, a convent of Carmelites serves as a model of full retreat, between which and the total immersion of court life the idyll is a middle ground.

The exchange with Motteville tests and refines Mademoiselle's vision. Motteville responds with reserve, casting herself as the wise and loyal counselor, as if in the pages of a pastoral herself. Though this lady-in-waiting to Anne of Austria had perhaps even better reasons than Mademoiselle to disparage marriage, having endured a two-year union at the age of 18 to the 90-year-old Langlois de Motteville, she tempers the prescriptions in Mademoiselle's melancholy reverie. Marriage, she counters, may be necessary for women's very protection, given that men will ever be imperfect and so ever seduce women. “I think that in the end you will be forced to allow the time-honored and legitimate custom

called marriage” (p. 39). Politesse inevitably brings gallantry in its train, no matter how we might wish we could “create boundaries for their feelings similar to the ones between France and Spain” (p. 57).

There is something persuasive and affecting about Mademoiselle’s letters, a sincerity of expression that prompts one to interpret her vision as a deep longing rather than a mere game. The relevant context here may be not only the immediate circumstance of the king’s nuptials—contrasting, as they do, with the 33-year-old princess’ ever-receiving, never-consummated experience with marriage proposals—but also the fact that she was just then re-entering the court after years of exile to Saint-Fargeau for her actions in the Fronde. Marriage and celibacy, society and solitude may have been the terms in which she framed her ambivalence about court life as well as the tensions between intellectual pursuits and social obligations. One hears in her letters the deepened voice of a woman who had learned, in exile, in her tutorials with Jean Regnault de Segrais, to enjoy her solitude and value her serious writing.[2] As DeJean reminds us, the dichotomy between intellectual aspirations and marriage was absolute: “A truly remarkable number of women writers were publishing in seventeenth-century France; not one of them managed to do so while maintaining a traditional marriage” (p. 3).

Joan DeJean’s introduction contextualizes the letters well. She might have included a few more letters, perhaps a few describing earlier occurrences on the trip to Saint-Jean-de-Luz that affected Mademoiselle’s sense of belonging with the royal family.[3] The eight she presents total only 23 pages (the introduction is an additional 23 pages). Still, the BNF manuscript to which she limits herself does constitute a gem on its own and does probably give us the set that circulated at the time.

DeJean notes that the letters exemplify a questioning of marriage that was widespread among elite women in mid-century Paris. Mademoiselle’s text records “a wealthy, independent woman’s dreams of how she might improve her existence and that of other women if she were to refuse to allow herself to be exchanged as a marital commodity.... how women might spend their lives if they did the unthinkable and decided not to marry” (pp. 4-5). Indeed, the correspondence mimics the conversation of salons—a dialogic play with novel ideas—and incorporates in miniature the feminist themes we first hear there: slavery and liberty, the heroics of illustrious women, male tyranny and female vulnerability, good principles and bad customs, ambition and repose, glory and innocence. Read with this in mind, the letters show the pastoral mode as “a convenient vehicle for masking political statements that could otherwise have seemed subversive” (p. 18).

It is instructive to juxtapose this emergence of feminist protest against marriage to the tightening of patriarchal legal strictures that has been shown to occur in the same years.[4] DeJean suggests a different referent: More’s *Utopia*. She calls Mademoiselle’s vision “a feminist counterpart “ to Utopia, but this may be one of several overstatements. Does Mademoiselle “plan to establish a community” (p. 16) with “a plan of action” (p. 3)? Is Mademoiselle’s imagining truly an ideal state under female control? Or is her vision more a matter of personal longing than of social engineering and hence an expression of an impulse quite different from More’s? Her idyll seems not to be a total community, designed to change human behavior, but merely a personal option that makes one’s own life agreeable.

It was to Mademoiselle that François Poullain de la Barre dedicated his *De l’Education des dames pour la conduite de l’esprit dans les sciences et dans les moeurs* in 1674. She, he avowed, personified “no less through the excellence of her mind and her learning than through the greatness of her birth and her courage” (p. 139) the qualities to which he hoped his educational plan would encourage other ladies to aspire. This was the second of the three treatises of Cartesian feminism that Poullain published in Paris in the 1670s. The first, *De l’Egalité des deux sexes: discours physique et moral où l’on voit l’importance de se défaire des préjugés* (1673), was translated almost immediately into English as *The Woman as Good as the Man, or the Equality of Both Sexes* (1677), but neither *De l’Education* nor *De l’Excellence des hommes, contre l’égalité des sexes* (1675) has previously been accessible to Anglophone audiences.

Poullain's works were more radical than Mademoiselle's and, like *Utopia*, a deep challenge to established institutions. Poullain considered himself a Cartesian, but he was more suspicious of philosophical systems and less reticent on social questions than the master. He applied the criterion of clear and distinct ideas, and the method of doubt and rational examination to social issues. Every custom, every institution, every idea should be subjected to scrutiny by every individual, for each had the ability to judge and to throw off prejudices that did not meet the test. "What use would be our capacity for distinguishing the true from the false, the good from the bad, if we did not use it? Since every man possesses his own reason and his own understanding, he should use them to govern himself independently of others when he reaches the age of discernment" (*Education*, pp. 183-84).

As for the belief in the inequality of the sexes, Poullain found it a prejudice based on error. "It is easy to see that the difference between the two sexes is limited to the body, since that is the only part used in the reproduction of humankind. Since the mind merely gives its consent, and does so in exactly the same way in everyone, we can conclude that it has no sex" (*Equality*, 82). Universal acceptance of civil inequality was not proof of its prescription "by the Creator of nature" (*Equality*, 55), but only of the inability of men to adapt social organization to evolving social conditions. History was moving toward the political and civil equality of the sexes, toward the inclusion of women in all areas of public life, and toward abolition of customs or traditions constraining women that were once, but no longer, appropriate.

To suggest again a cross-Channel comparison, it seems instructive to juxtapose Poullain's historical method and social claims to those of John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government*. Like Locke a decade later, Poullain traces a speculative human history from a hypothetical primitive society into the social and political states, though of course he differs from Locke in placing the relationship of the sexes at the very center of human evolution. And like the later Locke, he speaks of marriage as an egalitarian association based not on hierarchy between husband and wife but what is authorized by differences in education and experience. "The promises and conventions of marriage are reciprocal, and power over the body equal....the will of one is not the rule of the other. In no way can a woman be forced to submit to her husband beyond reason simply because he is stronger. That would be the behavior of out-and-out bullies and not of intelligent adults" (*Equality*, 78). As concerned as his royal dedicatee with whether marriage is conducive to women's well being, Poullain, then, presses his remaking of social relations in a different direction from Mademoiselle and on epistemological and ideological bases that she, a feminist in a more aristocratic vein, could scarcely have approved.

Poullain's work is important in the history of philosophy as well as in the history of feminist thought. Though his publications found some readership in his own day--*De l'Egalité* went through five editions by 1691--they quickly fell into obscurity, and he has until recently been regarded as a mere curiosity or an anomaly, at best a contributor to a narrow debate on women. Publication of these three treatises will allow a much deeper appreciation of the philosophical currents from which proposals for radical restructuring of society arose in the seventeenth century. The editor, Marcelle Maistre Welch, provides succinct introductions to each treatise and helpful annotations to the texts. Her introduction to the volume, however, offers little insight into the historical context or the philosophical traditions that Poullain drew upon and contested.

Fortunately, Siep Stuurman's book on Poullain will appear soon from Harvard University Press. Stuurman looks at Poullain's entire corpus--the feminist/philosophical writings and the later religious treatises--embeds it in the social and intellectual contexts of late seventeenth-century France and early eighteenth-century Geneva, and, using both the works and Poullain's little-known life story, links him convincingly to the origins of the Enlightenment. Stuurman's book will for the first time give this minor writer the full treatment that is warranted by his reorientation of critical inquiry and place him at the origins of modern liberal social thought. In the meantime, readers can supplement the three treatises presented in this volume with several older and still valuable studies of the texts.[5]

NOTES

[1] Abby E. Zanger, *Scenes from the Marriage of Louis XIV: Nuptial Fictions and the Making of Absolutist Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[2] On Mademoiselle's life, an excellent recent work is Vincent Pitts, *La Grande Mademoiselle at the Court of France, 1627-1693* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

[3] These are excerpted and analyzed in Madeleine Bertaud, "En Marge de leurs Mémoires, une correspondance entre Mlle de Montpensier et Mme de Motteville," *Travaux de littérature* 3 (1990): 277-95.

[4] Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16 (1989): 4-27.

[5] Madeleine Alcover, *Poullain de la Barre: une aventure philosophique*. Biblio 17, Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature (Seattle, 1981); Geneviève Fraisse, "Poullain de la Barre ou le procès des préjugés," *Corpus* 1 (1985), 27-41; Michael A. Seidel, "Poullain de la Barre's The Woman as Good as the Man," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974), 499-508.

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