
Anne E. Duggan. *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005. 289p.

ALEKSANDRA GRUZINSKA
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

As a title, *Salonnières, Furies and Fairies* does no justice to the critical treatment of the contents of this volume. The subtitle, however—*Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France*—points to a serious study of literature, society, and culture in the 17th-century France of Louis XIV. Anne Duggan rehabilitates two key women writers who remain outside the French canon of traditionally studied literary works: Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1650/1-1705). Their writings, social position, and cultural influence contributed to discussions that engaged Nicolas Boileau (for the ancients) and Charles Perrault (for the moderns), leading to the famous debate or “Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes” (“The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns”). The dialogue included the role women played in the private and public spheres or affairs of family and state.

In Chapter One (25-49), Duggan provides a historical overview from feudal to modern times of change in politics (i.e., from chivalry to the absolutist movement), and the change brought on by culture: the humanist education, the creation of Jesuit *collèges*, women's *salons*, and the *Academies* that promoted men and excluded women. She notes the increased cloistering of women in an effort to exclude them from the public sphere. Men had opportunities to seek glory, and women, confined to domestic life, hoped for an equal chance at the same privilege through education and writing. Duggan introduces early in her analysis the influence that politics, business, and law, as well as women had on language (*préciosité*) and literature.

In Chapter Two (50-90), Duggan studies Scudéry's *Clélie, Histoire Romaine* and the famous “Carte de Tendre.” Chapter Three (91-120) introduces us to Scudéry's *Chroniques des Samedis*. The gatherings in her *salon* for her *habitués* or regular visitors took place on Saturdays. They supported the socio-cultural public sphere or *mondanité*, encouraged networking among the *précieux*, forming professional alliances, and promoting a political *parlementaire* agenda already suggested in *Clélie*. The Saturday gatherings favored developing social skills through letter writing, conversation, and negotiation of relationships between male and female as outlined in the “Carte de Tendre,” using the latter as a guide. Of interest were questions of obedience, control over one's feelings, superiority/equality among lovers, and interpersonal relations which, according to Scudéry were to be regulated by civility rather than physical aggression (duels or rape, for instance). Tyrannical passions

or lovers translated at the political level to usurpation of power and the dangers of absolute domination. Scudéry/Sapho rather than being frivolous, appears to have been, on the contrary, a serious writer who “masterly manipulated historical discourses” taming the male and female warrior (89). In the process she transformed the pen into an allegorical sword, and a powerful 17th-century patron’s “secretary” into a modern-day vassal (119).

Chapter Four (121-164) offers an insight into Boileau’s ideas on women’s folly and their irrationality. In *Les Héros de roman* and *Satire X* Boileau praises the ancient warrior heroes and ridicules the more “feminine” and peace-loving modern heroes in Scudéry’s fiction. Nor is Perrault’s *Apologie des femmes* (*In Praise of Women*) as favorable to women as the title of his work might suggest. Some of his contes propose obedience to parents and husbands as a woman’s highest virtue. Obedient women, unassertive and docile, confined their lives to the private sphere. In Perrault’s fairy tales, society rewards women’s obedience, docility, submission, domestic labor, lack of curiosity, passivity—traits that remove women from power and make them socially and politically un-enterprising. Women who transgressed in these areas were severely punished, as exemplified by Bluebeard, “an extreme, negative form of husbandly authority” (156). Perrault, according to Duggan, defended men’s authority in the public sphere and the absolute rule of father and husband in the private sphere. Although this is not an entirely new idea, it is forcefully demonstrated.

It will take a woman who, like Scudéry, will propose positive social, political, and cultural roles for women and “challenge the tyranny of patriarchs within public and private spheres” (166). To do so, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy takes us to England in Chapter Five (165-200) in *L’Histoire d’Hypolite, comte de Douglas* (1690). D’Aulnoy’s short stories form the subject matter of Chapter Six (201-239). Through a “mirror” effect, comparing English and French political systems, d’Aulnoy defends *mondanité*, the culture of the salons, and aristocracy. She opposes familial tyranny and surveillance, forced marriages, absolutism, and religious intolerance and persecution. She portrays more favorably, like Don Quixote, the chivalric system that, from a political point of view, is a step back. D’Aulnoy, however, takes a much more progressive attitude towards women. The heroines of her short stories dare to disobey, nor do they lack ambition or curiosity. They dare to take initiatives to free themselves from the tyranny of others and the tyranny of domestic labor (torture), and are rewarded with political, social, and marital success. From a feminist position, d’Aulnoy suggests that “women indeed can be capable and reasonable rulers” in femino-centric worlds.

Duggan takes the feminist approach that a political and social environment that excluded women did not prevent them to make important cultural contributions.

She concludes that “Absolutism in all its repression failed to put a stop to women’s participation in the cultural production of French society” (48). What makes her study original and passionate is her approach to literature through the language of politics, business, and law. Duggan’s rich itinerary leads us through the maze of Scudéry’s complex and complicated novels and d’Aulnoy’s many characters and themes as the latter proposes roles for women different from those of Perrault. Duggan’s work will appeal to 17th-century specialists, feminists, historians, and psychologists, and intellectually sophisticated readers interested in French literature, women, and gender studies. ✱

Hugh Thomas. *Beaumarchais in Seville*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. 177p.

BARBARA PETROSKY
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH AT JOHNSTOWN

Beaumarchais in Seville is a very lively account of Beaumarchais' visit to Madrid from 18 May 1764 to 22 March 1765. In this book Hugh Thomas explains that even though Beaumarchais never went to Seville, he re-created after his trip to Madrid a society that excited his imagination. There, he met numerous persons who inspired him greatly in his writing of *The Barber of Seville* (1775), *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784), and the less popular *The Guilty Mother* (1790).

Before briefly setting the historical and intellectual atmosphere in Europe at the time of Beaumarchais' travel, Thomas gives the reader a two-page explanation of the main persons or "characters" that Beaumarchais will meet while in Madrid. These two pages titled "Dramatis Personae" also give the reader the impression that he is going to read a play.

Why did Beaumarchais set his two very successful plays in Seville without even having gone there? And what did he do while in Madrid? These are the two main questions that Thomas answers in a very enjoyable way. Thomas believes that Beaumarchais chose to set his plays in Seville because this city was the capital of Spain's vast empire in the Americas, and also because it seemed to Beaumarchais to be one of the main cultural centers where such beautiful dances, such as the Fandango, originated. The question of what Beaumarchais did in Madrid is the more important of the two and is answered throughout the book.

The first reason for Beaumarchais to leave Paris was to go help one of his sisters, Lisette, who had suffered a painful disappointment when her fiancé José Clavijo broke off their engagement at the last moment. Thomas' research led him to the belief that Clavijo was a very witty and enlightened man who, in other circumstances, might have enjoyed a close relationship with Beaumarchais. While in Madrid, however, Beaumarchais also had to be a French agent for his friend the successful and wealthy Pâris-Duverney. His tasks were to secure for France a monopoly on the slave trade to the Spanish empire, and to be the primary supplier of provisions to the Spanish army. Beaumarchais also sought on behalf of Pâris-Duverney the approval of the Spanish government for the colonization of the Sierra Morena, and the control of trade in Louisiana. Finally, on his own initiative he attempted to put his own mistress, Madame de Croix, also a French agent, in the bed of the King Charles III. All these schemes finally failed, mostly because at that time in Spain there existed a prevailing sentiment of hatred toward France and French people.

Thomas' main proposal in this study is that while in Madrid, Beaumarchais was very interested in *sainetes*, comical one-act plays which were performed during the interval of other plays and which reflected one aspect of the reality of Spanish society with witty characters usually from the working class. According to Thomas, Beaumarchais was especially influenced by the playlets of one Ramón de la Cruz so much so that the tone of de la Cruz' *sainetes* can be found in his own plays. The last chapter of this book is dedicated to the study of the characters of *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Guilty Mother*. In this particular chapter, Thomas tries very successfully to discover the origins of the Count of Almaviva, Rosine, and Figaro, among others. Even though these characters are probably based on real people whom Beaumarchais met in Madrid, they are also based on the ones he saw in the *sainetes*. Figaro, for example, derives from one of de la Cruz' *sainete*, *El Barbero*, but Figaro's radical views and revolutionary ideas are those of Beaumarchais.

Finally, drawing on Beaumarchais' letters to his family and friends, translated in English for the first time, Thomas give us a very thorough and vivacious description of the eighteen months that Beaumarchais spent in Madrid, telling us where he lived, which monuments he visited, who were his friends and enemies. By taking excerpts from the letters of Beaumarchais and his friends and putting them in his text, Thomas tries to recreate a dialogue that could have taken place between Beaumarchais and his interlocutors. Even though the main sources for this book were the writings of Beaumarchais, especially his plays and memoirs, Thomas offers an insightful study of the history of mid-18th-century Spain. Although Thomas uses a historical approach, this study is a useful tool for the scholars studying Beaumarchais or the Enlightenment from a literary perspective. This book could be used as a secondary source for literature courses on Beaumarchais. ✱