

BOOK REVIEWS

Braider, Christopher. *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4426-4348-2. Pp. 340. \$75.

Christopher Braider's *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*, winner of the 2012 Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for French and Francophone Studies awarded by the MLA, is an impassioned and engaging effort to put paid to the image of seventeenth-century France as a staid bulwark of rational classicism. This "tenacious idol to which most accounts of the early modern West pay homage" (3), tends to rest, Braider notes, on a vision of Descartes as the century's emblematic figure, an intellectual hero whose dualist philosophy encapsulated the period's longing for the certitudes afforded by a well-founded and transparent order. To counter this vision, Braider introduces his survey of seventeenth-century French cultural production with a reading of Montaigne's essay "De l'expérience," a provocative choice that serves to place the age of classicism against the messiness of contingent embodiment rather than, say, against the geometric reflecting pools of Versailles. As such, this reading prepares the analyses that follow, which draw out the repressed Montaigne-ness of some of the century's most notable writers and thinkers in order to locate what Braider calls "the duplicities that characterize French classical culture as a whole, engendering the nagging second thoughts that put it on both sides of every issue" (31).

Appropriately, then, Braider moves on to Descartes, reminding the reader that the philosopher's metaphysical masterpiece, the *Meditations*, never, in fact, enjoyed the status of an authoritative document. Instead of the warm welcome that the familiar narrative of the classical era might lead us to expect, the text was greeted with a series of objections from scientists, philosophers, and theologians inside and outside of France. Braider demonstrates how the inclusion of these objections along with Descartes's responses in the published work exemplifies not duality, but dialogism, resulting in a work that can never quite attain the triumphant abstraction for which it strives. Descartes does, in the end, provide a useful framework through which to view the century, but only insofar as his aspiration for the clear, the distinct, and the universal is undercut by the inevitable pull of chaotic contingency.

Braider goes on to trace the ways in which the stubbornness of the particular subverts the willed universality of classicism through the art of Poussin, the plays of Corneille and Molière, the thought of Pascal, and the satires of Boileau. The wide range of works considered, as well as the looseness of Braider's theoretical apparatus, can at times lead the reader to

wonder to what extent the conflict between universal and particular is specific to seventeenth-century France. Yet answering this question would entail engaging in precisely the kind of clumsy causality or easy inferences that Braider argues miss the point; it is impossible to tie the century with a neat bow, especially since the seventeenth-century thirst for order is also our own. Accordingly, Braider's study succeeds especially well in his close readings of the works he considers. His account of the delicate equilibrium between the abstract sovereignty of the rational and the seductive materiality of color in Poussin's painting is masterful. In the following chapter, he offers a reading of *Médée* that convincingly argues that Corneille's identification with strong female characters reflects the author's consciousness of the unseemliness of pursuing literary greatness and personal autonomy in a century devoted to classical conformity. His attention to Molière's relatively little-studied play *Le Cocu imaginaire* focuses on the play's circulating portrait in order to demonstrate the playwright's sly and persistent subversion of the classical ideals of univocity and transparency with an eye to "the often tragic potential of comic embodiment" (152). His chapter on Pascal points to the ways in which his philosophy and science intersect to complicate the apologetic goals of the *Pensées*. Finally, his examination of Boileau's satire on *l'équivoque* deftly illustrates the ways in which this rhetorical category denotes the *supplément* that is at once unavoidable and unassimilable to the classical ideal of clarity.

Braider's wide-ranging work is not without its flaws. Although he includes a sympathetic reading of Corneille's female characters, the absence of female writers is glaring, especially given recent work, most notably by Faith Beasley, that argues that the "tenacious idol" of classicism is at least partly the result of centuries of overlooking women's contributions to seventeenth-century French culture. Braider's treatment of religion can also be puzzling. While he does acknowledge that theology, in the early modern period, was "an intellectual discipline to which, despite the era's growing secularism, all others remained subordinate" (156), religion gets relatively short shrift. The chapter on Descartes focuses on mind-body dualism while hardly mentioning the *Meditations*' other avowed purpose—to prove the existence of God—and Gassendi is described as a materialist and an Epicurean, but never as a priest. I also remain unconvinced that Mme Sganarelle's infatuation with the portrait of Lélie in the *Cocu imaginaire* can be described as idolatry, insofar as idolatry typically involves overlooking, not (as is the case here) admiring, the materiality of the worshipped object.

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That said, Braider's provocative arguments, supported by readings that are often no less than ingenious, are a joy to read. Braider's humor and light touch are also on display, as when he notes that Descartes is "no old fart of a *sorbonnard*" (53) or refers to the *coups d'état* theorized by Naudé as "the baroque equivalent of Bush-era 'shock and awe'" (95). The reader frequently has the delightful impression of being in the classroom of an exceptional professor, whose attention to detail and refusal to accept received wisdom at face value push his students towards a deeper appreciation of these infinitely complex texts. Braider's efforts to destabilize the classical canon, or, more accurately, to point to the ways in which the canon destabilizes itself, constitute a compelling argument that seventeenth-century French culture is more relevant than ever—even, or especially, in twenty-first century American universities where the struggle between the quest for Truth and the particularities of historical embodiment continues to be passionately and urgently fought.

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Randall, Catharine. *The Wisdom of Animals: Creatureliness in Early Modern French Spirituality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-268-04035-2. Pp. 178. \$28.

L'ouvrage de Catharine Randall se recommande par son côté interdisciplinaire et l'ampleur du champ considéré. Dans *The Wisdom of Animals : Creatureliness in Early Modern French Spirituality*, elle étudie la manière de concevoir et d'utiliser les animaux dans les écrits de quatre auteurs des XVI^e au XVIII^e siècles. Sa pensée prend pour point de départ la définition théologique des animaux fondés sur la Bible et l'interprétation de saint Thomas d'Aquin selon laquelle les animaux n'ont pas d'âme et ont été mis sur terre par le créateur afin de servir l'homme. À l'opposé du spectre, elle sollicite les penseurs modernes des droits des animaux, comme Keith Thomas, Diana Donald et Erica Fudge, afin de mesurer les acquis quant à la perception des animaux, leurs structures sociales, leur capacité à communiquer, à sentir et à vivre des émotions. C'est sur cette ligne de tension qu'elle situe les quatre auteurs de son corpus : Michel de Montaigne, Guillaume Salluste Du Bartas, François de Sales et Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant. Dans ce très vaste panorama qui l'amène de 1570 à 1739, elle ne s'intéresse pas seulement à un corpus hétéroclite d'œuvres, allant des essais philosophiques jusqu'aux « amusements » d'un abbé mondain des Lumières en passant par la poésie épique protestante et les manuels de dévotion, elle accumule les approches théoriques et

méthodologiques, empruntant à la philosophie, à la théologie, aux études littéraires, à l'histoire des mœurs et des sensibilités, l'histoire des sciences et du sentiment religieux. Son livre intéressera les spécialistes de la spiritualité du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle, les littéraires qui considèrent la fiction au croisement de l'histoire des idées, des savoirs et des perceptions, les activistes et les théoriciens modernes des droits des animaux qui s'interrogent sur les origines et les fondements de leurs propres pratiques.

Il faut donc saluer l'effort et l'audace de cette chercheuse en poste à Dartmouth College, qui s'attaque à un aspect méconnu de la spiritualité du long dix-septième siècle et une source importante des sensibilités modernes. L'originalité et la pertinence du sujet se déploient dans les quatre chapitres, chacun consacré à un auteur qui ne s'intéressait pas spécifiquement aux animaux, mis à part le dernier. Le chapitre sur Montaigne propose de fines analyses de *L'Apologie pour Raimond Sebon*, où Montaigne s'enthousiasme devant les hirondelles, leur intelligence et leur capacité à construire des nids, mais s'en sert surtout pour justifier la démarche de sa pensée. Dans le second chapitre, elle subordonne la longue énumération des animaux que fait Du Bartas dans *La Sepmaine* à une poétique du regard où le lecteur prendrait la position privilégiée de Dieu devant la création. Se tournant vers *L'Introduction à la vie dévote* de François de Sales dans son troisième chapitre, elle met en valeur la méthode spirituelle d'imagerie mentale grâce à laquelle les animaux ouvrent une voie d'accès privilégiée au divin, images qui jouent un rôle important dans la conception de la grâce au début du siècle. Le dernier chapitre se tourne vers un père Jésuite du XVIII^e siècle, l'abbé Bougeant, théologien sérieux et réputé par ailleurs, mais qui commet un *Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bêtes* (1739), dans lequel il argumente en faveur de l'âme des bêtes à partir de la notion de métempsychose, où des démons circulent de corps en corps, pourvoyant ainsi les animaux d'une intelligence, d'une capacité à sentir et à s'exprimer. Pour bonifier sa recherche et pour affirmer ses analyses, elle n'hésite pas à solliciter plusieurs auteurs secondaires, de Ronsard à La Fontaine en passant par Ignace de Loyola, Calvin, Bérulle et Descartes. Toutes ces qualités font de l'ouvrage de Catharine Randall un livre utile au champ des études interdisciplinaires du long XVII^e siècle, agréable à lire malgré quelques redondances, et solide sur le plan de la recherche malgré quelques oublis bibliographiques.

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Winn, Colette H., ed. *Teaching French Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2011. ISBN 978-1-60329-089-0. Pp. viii & 440. \$40

This collective work is both a critical reappraisal of current thinking on early modern women writers and a guide to studying their works, particularly in the classroom. Winn's introduction explains the political, religious, and sociocultural background essential for understanding the works of French women writers of the sixteenth century. It includes a comprehensive overview of social and legal perspectives on gender, as well as a description of the public and private lives that women of the era were likely to experience, the education they might receive, and the reception faced by women who wrote and saw their works published. The essays that follow, divided into four sections, explore a broad range of women writers from myriad interrelated perspectives.

The first part of the volume establishes the cultural, literary, economic, and social context in which early modern French women wrote. Brigitte Roussel examines the representation of marriages and domestic relationships in Nicole Estienne's *Misères de la femme mariée*. Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier contends that visual art of the era can help students understand women's roles in early modern society; her approach will bring a much appreciated interdisciplinarity to courses centered on literature. Carrie F. Klaus discusses women's lives in convents, focusing on their experience of the Protestant Reformation. Diane S. Wood and Laura B. Bergman examine the influence of humanism on the writings of Hélienne de Crenne, in an essay that encourages student reflection on the importance of humanism in early modern writing across lines of gender and genre. Susan Broomhall considers women's writing in the context of work, and situates it within the notion of gendered labor. An understanding of this concept is particularly important for today's students, who often think of early modern women as excluded from economic activity. François Rigolot describes the literary, cultural, and legal transformation that took place in Europe, beginning in the fifteenth century, that fostered the notion of individual intellectual ownership, and thereby encouraged literary production and publication, including among women authors. Dora E. Polachek illustrates the long literary history of women's erotic desirability, concentrating on such writers as Marot, Ronsard, Labé, Brantôme, and Marguerite de Navarre. Ann Rosiland Jones discusses Pernette du Guillet and her use of Neoplatonic conventions, establishing textual links between Du Guillet and her literary contemporaries.

Part II treats specific authors, beginning with Zeina Hakim's study of Louise Labé's use of *imitatio*. Danielle Trudeau examines classical influences evident in Pernette Du Guillet's poetry, as well as the poet's innovations, through a close reading of Du Guillet's chanson 7. Jane Couchman proposes that students investigate the epistolary genre through an examination of a variety of letters penned by women from a wide range of social classes. Using Georgette de Mornay's emblem books as an example, Carla Zecher shows how books serve as both texts and as objects. Both Couchman's essay and Zecher's deepen students' awareness and understanding of material aspects of the early modern era. Edith Joyce Benkov demonstrates women's engagement in the world outside home and convent through an exploration of Anne de Marquet's pasquinades. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu suggests that students read Marie de Gournay's *Discours sur ce livre*, not only as an entry into her work and her authorial persona, but also as a way of better understanding the difficulties faced by Renaissance women writers as they sought to establish themselves as recognized and respected public figures.

Part III proposes specific pedagogical and critical strategies for study of early modern women writers. The approaches suggested here will also serve as an excellent introduction for both undergraduate and graduate students to the application of literary and cultural theory. Leslie Zarker Morgan locates Louise Labé in the particular cultural, historical, and literary context that was mid-sixteenth-century Lyon. Carla Freccero has chosen novella 30 of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* – a story that inevitably seizes students' attention – to demonstrate how feminist and queer approaches to reading early modern women's writings can open new ways to understand their works. Nancy Frelick approaches Hélienne de Crenne's *Les angoysses douloureuses qui procèdent d'amours* through the perspective of transference as a way to lead students beyond an autobiographical reading of the text, or a view of it as largely derivative. Frelick's essay also provides an excellent demonstration of the effects of a book's reception, both among its contemporary audience and over time. Cécile Alduy suggests that students' learning to decode Petrarchan lyrics is essential, not only for their understanding of Louise Labé's poetry, but more fundamentally, for grasping the complex cultural construction that is gender. Claude La Charité draws our attention to the masculine "I" that appears in Marie de Romieu's verse, challenging students' frequent assumption that the poetic "I" is autobiographical. Androgynous writing is also the focus of Leah Chang's essay, in which she examines a wide range of male poets writing in the voice of a woman. Anne R. Larsen explores female writing communities revealed in the works of Catherine des

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Roches, from literary salons to networks that spanned centuries and crossed national boundaries. Larson's essay provides a welcome and indeed necessary corrective for students who still imagine that early modern women writers were isolated and even alienated. Gary Ferguson argues for the inclusion of the poetry of the Catholic nun Anne de Marquets in a course on women writers. The addition of Marquets's devotional poetry to courses where students read love-themed poems and stories (which tend to be quite popular and are probably more easily understood) will enable them to explore a wider range of women's writing. Mary B. McKinley suggests that students complement their reading of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* with Marie Dentière's *Epistle* to Marguerite de Navarre as a way to better understand the significance of the Protestant Reformation in the lives of early modern French women. McKinley also uses Dentière's *Epistle* as an opportunity for students to study rhetoric, which is crucial to understanding sixteenth-century literature. Colette H. Winn recommends that students undertake a comparative study of Gabrielle de Coignard's spiritual verse and Louise Labé's love sonnets, which will enhance the students' understanding of the place of Petrarchism in the work of both poets. Winn's approach can be applied to a number of comparative studies, helping students find connections among texts, creating a veritable literary tapestry. Deborah Lesko Baker addresses the sometimes problematic issue of having students read texts in Middle French. She suggests making Louise Labé's prose works available to students both in the original French and in English translation.

Part IV of this collection points the reader to an abundant and diverse collection of resources. In one essay Colette H. Winn lists a number of critical editions of women writers' work; in the following chapter she directs the reader to journals, professional associations, conferences, and colloquia for scholars of early modern women writers. A survey of valuable online resources is provided by Winn and Graziella Postolache. Karen Simroth James and Mary B. McKinley open the door to the past a bit wider for students by suggesting ways they can access centuries-old texts, both via online resources – digital facsimiles are more and more available – and directly in special collections that house rare books. James and McKinley also suggest ways that those resources might be used.

This volume will be a precious resource for teachers and for scholars. The selection of writers, subjects, and approaches is both broad and deep, and will prove invaluable for those who wish to include women writers in survey courses or courses focusing on a particular theme or genre, and for those constructing a course specifically centered on early modern women

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writers. The authors included in this volume have chosen texts that will fascinate students, drawing them into the literary culture of sixteenth-century France. At the same time, these texts will certainly challenge students, pushing them to understand the era in new ways, and to see from new perspectives not only early modern women's lives, but the lives of early modern men as well, and even, perhaps especially, human experience across the centuries.

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