

exigence ardue, ou au contraire leur apostasie, à la lumière de *Rodogune*, *Héraclius* (distinction du Roi et du Héros), Don Sanche, *Cédipe* (confusion des deux), Cléopâtre, *Pertharite*, Massinisse, Pacorus (régression héroïque du Roi), Grimoald, Othon, Agésilas (avatars d'une promotion royale). Le théâtre politique trouve son accomplissement ultime dans un théâtre d'histoire au sens plénier, prospectif.

Signalons très succinctement trois points qui contribuent à la *séduction* des analyses d'Emmanuel Minel. Il commente avec une subtilité attentive les pièces dont la réputation a été chahutée. *Théodore*, d'abord. Approfondir comment le sujet scabreux faussa la conduite de la pièce. Au 4^{ème} acte, l'action frise le comique... Plus intéressant, le cas de *Pertharite*, pièce irréprochable au fond, si ce n'est pour son authentique sincérité amoureuse. Deuxième point, une heureuse polarisation du commentateur sur *Othon*, sur *Suréna*, nous convaincant de voir dans la seconde de ces pièces une stigmatisation des pernicieuses monarchies non-chrétiennes, plus subtile que dans *Attila*, et aussi une contestation du romanesque royal des flatteurs de Louis XIV. Toujours plus combattif est Corneille. Troisième point... une abondance de rapprochements aussi suggestifs qu'inattendus surgissant d'analyses raffinées.

La synthèse ample et subtile contenue dans ce livre est à aborder par étapes, le fil principal fléchissant au besoin pour l'accueil des précieux encarts historiques. La typographie des sous-titres est trop floue pour une lecture fluide. Inconvénients légers, au demeurant. Corneille annonçait à l'abbé de Pure ses trois *Discours*, après lesquels, disait-il, « il n'y a plus guère de question d'importance à remuer, ce qui reste n'est que la broderie qu'y peut ajouter la rhétorique, la morale et la politique ». Options intimes. Discrètement, Minel affronte (morale, politique) ce programme laissé en suspens par le poète, et sa réponse nuancée, mais sans timidité, éveille les multiples échos d'une conscience politique méditative, qu'on ne pourra plus réduire à des images simplificatrices, d'héroïsme insatisfait, ou de placide acquiescement.

François Lasserre

Barbara R. Woshinsky: *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800: The Cloister Disclosed*. Farnham, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010. 344 p.

This book has a much wider purview than its title suggests, and readers well beyond scholars interested in convent studies will find it valuable. Porno-

graphy, allegory, women's empowerment, and the body are only a few of the themes that receive extensive treatment. This is possible because the convent was so omnipresent in the experience of early modern women, "an open secret taken for granted by everyone, or at least by women" that required "little description simply because it [was] so familiar" (p. 302-303). The contribution of Woshinsky's book is to open up for twenty-first century readers this "secret" as it was seen by men and women in early modern literary representation.

The book does so first of all by examining a broad range of texts spanning (despite the subtitle) five centuries. Of course, it offers innovative analyses of the canonical novels with convent settings one would expect to find: *La Religieuse*, *La Vie de Marianne*, *Les Lettres portugaises*. But it captures a truly panoramic view of imagined convent space by devoting as much attention to writers of texts where convent life is more episodic: canonical authors like La Fayette, recently recognized ones like Villedieu, or ones struggling for recognition like Jean-Pierre Camus; *mémoire* writers like the Mancini sisters and Mademoiselle de Montpensier; the English writer Margaret Cavendish. Woshinsky's conclusion extends past *René*, *Ourika*, and *Lélia*, to Toni Morrison's *Paradise*.

Woshinsky uses numerous spatial grids to explore this wide-ranging corpus and to break down the popularly held dichotomy of convent space that sees the cloister as a prison or, on a somewhat more positive note, as a refuge. Two strike me as most crucial to her project. The first privileges the issue of positioning without or within and includes the modern usage of "inner space" and the early modern notion of a spiritual *intérieur* (p. 13). Convents can also be seen in terms of a gendered version of Foucault's heterotopia, an alternative world on the margins; to Foucault's term, Woshinsky adds *feminotopia*, a community composed and controlled by women, and *femintopia*, an ideal feminine space (p. 3 n8; 300). Such categories insure conceptual rigor, but are applied without forcing the texts conform to preconceived molds. Another strength of the book is to compare secular and convent spaces: the cabinet with the cell, the salon with the parlor.

The Introduction sets the stage historically (Woshinsky makes fine use throughout of sure authorities like Elizabeth Rapley) and presents her gendered approach to the language of space whether Foucauldian, architectural, spiritual or geographical. Two preliminary chapters deal with the early seventeenth-century failure to conceive the body/soul dichotomy in gendered terms. In the second, she analyzes Camus's novel *Agathonphile* and several of his *histoires tragiques* and contrasts him with the more open attitude toward women of his mentor, François de Sales. Camus's inability

as an author to sublimate the sensual makes writing fiction a form of guilty self-pleasuring for him. In his fiction itself, his misogyny “imperatively leads to the narrative enclosure of women, alleged sources of temptations, in convents—or in tombs” (p. 115). He rails against lax convents because of his anxiety over the increased role of women in the Catholic Reformation.

A series of elegantly entitled chapters (Thresholds, Parlors, Cells, and Tombs) continues the chronological presentation of imagined convent spaces from the Fronde through the Revolution and beyond. Most begin with a historical or sociological introduction to the type of space stressed in the chapter. I found the discussion of the architectural plans of the up-scale Parisian convent, the Abbaye royale de Pentemont, in the *Encyclopédie* particularly fascinating. Woshinsky had devoted her first book in 1973 to *La Princesse de Clèves*; here, her discussion of place in the novel uncovers a dilation and contraction of spaces that concludes in a retreat that is as much an action as a place. Her treatment of *badinage* in *Vénus dans le cloître* highlights Jean Barrin’s misogynistic views of women’s propensity for lasciviousness. She points out the many ways in which the convent setting in *La Vie de Marianne* is more a help than a hindrance for its heroine. She offers a balanced assessment of Diderot’s case against monasticism in *La Religieuse* pointing out how many of his own presuppositions about women’s nature and the family weaken it. The final chapter on the closing of convents during the Revolution and their reopening by Napoleon and the Restoration is more historical than literary, but ably brings together the themes of Woshinsky’s analysis throughout the book. In general, she finds the male-authored texts more melodramatic and erotic, with a heavy dose of anachronism that tends to demonize convents as a social aberration, than those written by females. Women, on the other hand, depicted convents in a more matter-of-fact way, with a realistic sense of their limits and possibilities. Women, after all, were just as aware of the restrictions imposed by male-dominated marriage. She shows how traditional anticlericalism migrated by the eighteenth century from the tract to the new memoir-novel.

One bémol: despite the 2010 imprint, the criticism cited largely stops around 2006. Works like Barbara Diefendorf’s *From Penitence to Charity* or Mita Choudhury’s *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* don’t appear in the Works Cited. While I doubt that they would have substantially modified Woshinsky’s conclusions, particularly for the seventeenth century, readers will want to consult them for complementary nuance.

Imagining Women’s Conventual Spaces makes a major and timely contribution to early modern literary studies in general as well as to convent studies. The book is enhanced by twenty-six photographs and

reproductions. It has been over forty years since Jeanne Ponton's 1969 *La Religieuse dans la littérature française*. Woshinsky's gendered spatial perspective offers readings that bring out the full complexity of the works she treats. Her book also stands as a model to scholars who deal more directly with convent writing by the nuns themselves. Although Woshinsky does at times discuss texts written by nuns, her stress is on how outsiders imagine monastic space. As Woshinsky points out, the important community aspect of convent life is largely absent from such texts written by non nuns. If specialists of convent writing take up her spatial approach, they may find a powerful tool for analyzing communal writings such as convent chronicles and normative texts. It may allow them to pierce through the hagiographic commonplaces that permeate nuns' writing, just as Woshinsky has broken down the stereotype of the convent as prison or refuge.

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