connections between inheritance practices and family forms, his failure to incorporate new material substantiating his point, and notably Berkner's data on the stem family as a stage in the family life cycle, is disappointing. Alternatively, his focus on the transmission of property and hence the authority of the father overlooks Olwen Hufton's work on the poor in eighteenth century France and Tilly/Scott's work on the family economy, both of which might modify his opinions about the prevalence of patriarchy. His relatively rare remarks on the quality of sexual relations among the peasantry have not been amended, extended, or even justified in the light of Martine Segalen's criticisms of his equation of sex (and beauty) with love and his blindness to regional variations, which she attributes to differences in types of land-holding and social structure. One is forced to conclude that it was easier to remain the pioneer, above the important but complex issues raised by the anthropologists, demographers, and economic historians working in this field, than it was to include new evidence or reinterpret old evidence.

To conclude, the review edition of *Familles: Parenté, maison, sexualité dans l'ancienne société* is only useful as an introduction to the field of family history; it does not reflect recent scholarship and so is of little utility to specialists in that field.

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A Woman's Life in the Court of the Sun King: The Letters of Liselotte von der Pfalz, 1652-1720. Translated and introduced by ELBORG FORSTER. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Pp. lx, 287.

The palace of Versailles symbolizes glory and power, autocracy and sycophancy, magnificence and a special kind of squalor. What it does not normally evoke are images of long healthy walks, lots of fresh air, a chapter a day out of the Lutheran Bible, and a lifelong passion for smoked sausages and sauerkraut. Yet these habits, along with a keen mind and a down-to-earth common sense, characterize the very unusual lady who was Madame, the sister-in-law of Louis XIV.

Married at the age of nineteen to the homosexual Duc d'Orleans (whose first wife was reputed to have been poisoned by his favourites), Liselotte von der Pfalz brought little to her marriage but a strong constitution and a happy memory of her upbringing in a minor German court. Both of these she conserved for fifty-one lonely and frustrated years of exile from her homeland.

The life of a French "royal" was not an easy one. "The sons of France," wrote Louis XIV, "must never have any home but the court nor any resource but the love of their brother" (p. xl). Forbidden to travel without the King, Monsieur and Madame were tied together forever in the closed world of the court, totally alien to each other, vying with each other for the favour of the King who alone could dictate how they were to live and bring up their children. From this claustrophobic atmosphere, Liselotte found escape only in her correspondence with her German relations. The result is a collection of letters seething with impatience, anger and homesickness, yet totally involved in the business at hand, the work of being a royal princess. "As for getting out of this business altogether," she wrote in 1702, after she had become a widow, "that is quite out of the question; my calling and filial obedience have brought me here, and here I must live and die" (p. 145). As if to show how much she valued the *métier*, she composed rich descriptions of life at court, in all its colour, pomp and protocol. To let it down, by unworthy and shoddy behaviour, was in her mind the unforgivable crime.

Madame's correspondence could be, and indeed has been (p. ix) treated merely as a sort of "Deep Throat" source for information on louisquatorzian Versailles. This narrow view, however, neglects other dimensions which this edition rightly emphasizes: the development, in response to her difficult surroundings, of her own character, with its mixture of fierce royal pride, intelligent reflectiveness and robust peasant humour, and the fascinating bits of information which she dispenses. For her German proverbs alone, and her collection of old stories, customs and home remedies, Madame deserves at least passing attention from the social historian. In addition her writing is laced with all sorts of prejudices, pungently expressed. Doctors in France "send an incredible lot of children into the other world" (p. 15); priests are out to destroy the French theatre only because they "want to be the only actors" (p. 97). If all these gentlemen, along with their fellow charlatans, the lawyers, vanished altogether, "things would be better in the world" (p. 156).

Prejudice can be national, too. Why do people rush off to Rome? To see "all that to-do of priests"? Or, more probably, the "thirty thousand ladies of easy virtue" (p. 119)? Poland is "a wild and dirty country" (p. 104); Germany may be dirtier than Holland, but not nearly as dirty as France. England, she concedes, is not "the only place where bad marriages and peculiar men are found" (p. 102)! The Spanish court is full of wicked people — "and on top of that they are horribly ugly" (p. 139). As for her judgment on her adopted country — "if you've seen one Frenchman, you've seen them all" (p. 176).

And yet when all is said and done, it is for her descriptions of the gilded cage in which she lived that Madame's work is most valuable to the historian. She was a strong-minded woman, yet she was helpless. Hobbled by the marriage laws of France, she was unable to prevent her husband's depredations on her dowry. Even her silver mementoes from Germany were melted down to make gifts for his lovers (p. 111). Nothing in all her life distressed her more than the war in which the French Crown attacked her own country, the Palatinate, in support of her unwanted dynastic claims. "I am, as it were," she wrote, "my fatherland's ruin" (p. 61). She had nightmares in which she saw her father's cities reduced to ashes. Yet to show open distress was to be disloyal, and to win her the King's disapproval. The greatest disgrace of her life came with the marriage of her son to Louis' natural daughter. No hatred in her life, not even that which she felt for her husband's cronies, equalled the hatred that she felt for Madame de Maintenon, the King's wife, who, she believed, had engineered this marriage. Of this lady's rise to power, Liselotte could only comment that "the snow falls as easily on a cow plop as on a rose leaf" (p. 51). Of Louis XIV's reformation under her influence, she wrote that "I cannot believe that loving old women and being cranky can be pleasing to Our Lord" (p. 53). The insults with which she loaded her — "the old trollop," "the old ragbag," "pruneface" — were all the more vehement because she knew that her letters were being intercepted and copied at the Maintenon's command.

Nobody could accuse Madame of being objective. But it is this suffocating closeness, this total immersion in the life she was describing, that gives the correspondence its power. Liselotte was a true member of royalty, and as such she loved the institution but had no illusions about the people. "The *éclat* and renown of great kings are like the machines at the opera," she wrote. "Seen from afar, nothing is grander or more beautiful, but if one goes backstage and takes a look at all the ropes and wooden slats that make the machines move, they are most ungainly and ugly" (pp. 129-30).

As a look behind the scenes, this collection of letters is both tragic and comic, and altogether quite enthralling.

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