

Société des Nations), évité des césures de mots, repéré des références ou des notes manquantes.

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Jo Burr Margadant, ed. — *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Pp. x, 298.

In this nicely crafted collection of essays, six historians of modern France employ postmodern theories of biographical writing to explore changing aspects of gender and femininity in the nineteenth century. The contributors are all accomplished scholars who have published extensively in the fields of gender history and biography. As Jo Burr Margadant explains in the introduction, they have adopted the arguments of cultural theorists that the “subject of biography ... is a self that is performed to create an impression of coherence or an individual with multiple selves whose different manifestations reflect the passage of time, the demands and options of different settings, or the variety of ways that others seek to represent that person” (p. 7).

Within this framework, the authors examine how eight different women created public identities by manipulating, rather than directly challenging, the ideology of gender difference that relegated women to the domestic sphere. In this sense, then, these nineteenth-century writers and activists gave “performances” of femininity that, the authors contend, expanded the possibilities for women in public life.

The concept of a performed self can be employed to rescue women from historical obscurity, as Margadant skilfully demonstrates in her study of the duchesse de Berry, the young widowed mother of the last Bourbon heir to the throne of France. Drawing on a variety of sources, from fashion magazines to the memoirs of royalist women, Margadant analyses how the young duchess used the social life of Paris to create a public identity separate from that of the royal court and how royal publicists later manipulated her public image to create a more modern symbol of royal motherhood. Mary Pickering rescues Clotilde de Vaux from the stultifying adulation of August Comte, a man, she suggests, who was suffering a mid-life crisis. Her analysis of de Vaux’s writings and extensive correspondence with Comte reveals a complex and not altogether admirable woman who assumed a bewildering number of roles in her desperate struggle to achieve independence from her family and from predatory men.

Other contributors provide fresh interpretations of familiar figures by analysing the importance of the theatre in the creation of an authoritative public identity. Susan Grogan deftly traces the theatricality that pervaded the life of Flora Tristan, a woman who once disguised herself as a Turkish diplomat to attend a session of the British Parliament. As Grogan demonstrates, Tristan drew heavily on popular melodrama to invent a range of strong and, she hoped, convincing personae in her efforts to advance the rights of women and workers. Elinor Accampo argues that the pre-

1914 feminist Nelly Roussel found an outlet for her frustrated theatrical ambitions in speaking tours to promote birth control. As Roussel's private papers reveal, she was a demanding critic of her public performances, unhappy when fatigue dulled her efforts but exultant when she could move an audience or shame men into repentance. Mary Louise Roberts demonstrates that the theatre is central to any understanding of the feminism of Marguerite Durand, a former actress who founded *La Fronde*, France's first feminist newspaper with an all-female staff. Taking as her theme Durand's claim that "feminism owes a great deal to my blond hair" (p. 171), Roberts explores how Durand drew on the artifice and aesthetics of the theatre to make feminism both visible and attractive to a larger public that pictured feminists as ugly.

A recurrent theme in these essays is that even indirect challenges to nineteenth-century stereotypes of femininity involved risk. In her thoughtful study of three successful novelists, Whitney Walton analyses how George Sand, Marie d'Agoult (Daniel Stern), and Hortense Allart used autobiography to construct a father, or father figure, who implicitly sanctioned their non-traditional public roles. But all three women preferred to create an image of republican womanhood that centred on equality within the family rather than in the public sphere. Theirs, Walton aptly concludes, was a "mostly genteel struggle" (p. 102). Even in the era of the "new woman" at end of the nineteenth century, both Durand and Roussel based their public personae on conventional images of femininity. Roussel's success in preaching the radical message of birth control was the result, Accampo explains, of her deliberately constructed public identity as a traditional wife and devoted mother.

Such performances of femininity also risked reinforcing stereotypes of women. This is most obvious in the case of de Vaux, who, as Pickering notes, sought a career as a writer so as to defend women's need for male protection. Although these risks are acknowledged by the various authors, the consensus is that their biographical subjects used traditional images of the feminine in ways that disturbed assumptions and allowed women to speak with authority. Roberts, however, emphasizes that Durand's strategies of seduction on behalf of feminism placed her on slippery ground and concludes that Durand's behaviour undermined conventional femininity "by accident or intention" (p. 190).

Several of the authors venture beyond the concept of biography as multiple performances to address the hotly debated issue of the existence of a unified or coherent self. Margadant raises this point in her introduction to the volume, where she suggests that each woman had to construct a feminine identity that was "legible to the public and credible to herself" (p. 1). Walton does not discuss this aspect directly, but she does reveal how Sand, d'Agoult, and Allart, as female heads of families, put their theories of republican womanhood into practice. For Grogan, the concept of a performed public identity offers the biographer one way to give coherence to a life. Grogan also argues that these various public personae enabled Flora Tristan to create the figure of a woman leader that expressed her own sense of self. Roberts concentrates on Marguerite Durand's use of theatre as a political tool, but she does suggest that Durand's life was characterized by a drive for both independence and respectability, the result, perhaps, of her illegitimate birth. The most extensive consideration of the

possibility of a coherent self is provided by Accampo, who can draw on the private correspondence between Nelly Roussel and her husband. In a careful and considered analysis, Accampo juxtaposes the privately revealed Roussel with the public persona to argue that Roussel created a coherent identity that reconciled both a maternal and an individualistic self. In her private life, Roussel practised her feminist vision, while in her public life she fulfilled a deeply felt need to proselytize, to travel, and to be free of motherhood.

This volume of essays is directed to a wide scholarly audience, including graduate and undergraduate students with little background in French history, gender analysis, or cultural theory. As editor, Margadant has provided a clear and concise introduction to the relevant issues and a useful bibliography. The authors cannot avoid postmodern jargon, but they use it with restraint. Collectively and individually, these essays offer an engaging introduction to interesting women and important debates.

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Christine Métayer — *Au tombeau des secrets : les écrivains publics du Paris populaire. Cimetière des Saints-Innocents XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2000, 456 p.

En explorant les liens entre un métier et un des lieux où il se pratique, Christine Métayer nous mène sur un passionnant parcours socio-culturel. Elle prend comme cible les écrivains publics de Paris à l'époque moderne, mais pour bien comprendre les liens de ces gens avec le monde et le quartier qui les entoure, l'auteure se concentre spécifiquement sur les scribes qui pratiquent leur métier dans les galeries et sous les charniers autour de l'ancien cimetière des Saints-Innocents à Paris. Son travail se divise en trois volets. Le premier discute des caractéristiques parfois controversées du métier d'écrivain public. Le deuxième aborde le lieu, le cimetière des Saints-Innocents, et ses multiples vocations depuis le Moyen Âge jusqu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Enfin, la troisième section revient sur la question de l'insertion sociale des écrivains dans leur quartier, les pistes qu'ils suivent et les obstacles qu'ils rencontrent.

Dans sa première démarche, visant à caractériser les écrivains, Christine Métayer analyse les diverses facettes d'un métier éclaté. Au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, elle explique que l'expansion et la bureaucratisation de l'État et de l'Église confèrent une distinction sociale croissante aux lettrés. Devant cette demande, les collèges et les universités produisent de plus en plus de diplômés, mais le marché pour des secrétaires des grandes officines devient vite saturé. Les lettrés, scribes et écrivains, sont alors de plus en plus relégués aux tâches moins honorables. Comme explique l'auteure, « le surplus de lettrés disqualifiés, bafoués dans leurs prétentions, qu'attendaient désormais les fonctions médiocres de maître d'école ou de répétiteur. Pourquoi pas celle d'écrivain public? » (p. 97). En même temps, à partir du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, pour toutes les demandes, permis ou faveurs, il faut adresser une lettre de requête ou un placet à l'autorité en question. C'est alors qu'intervient l'écrivain public de façon anonyme; c'est lui qui rédige bien des documents qui proviennent des