

Anna Lia Franchetti. *L'ombre discourante de Marie de Gournay*.

Études Montaignistes 45. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006. 272 pp. index. bibl. €39. ISBN: 2-7453-1337-1.

The Discursive Shadow of Marie de Gournay is an expert study of the writings of Marie de Gournay from 1626 to 1641 and establishes her Stoic ethics and aesthetics in France on the eve of the Fronde. Divided into two parts, the “Theatre of Writing” and “‘Discursive Romance’ and ‘Discourse of Reason,’” Professor Franchetti’s study is a thematic analysis of the *Image of the Lady de Gournay* of 1626 and *The Views, or the Demands of the Lady de Gournay* of 1634 and 1641. It shows the evolution of Gournay’s vigorous and inventive writing talent and her insistence on connecting social and aesthetic criticism. It attempts to draw Gournay’s literary reputation from the shadow of the monumental *Essays*, for which she served as the first posthumous editor, and into a discursive space of her own. The introduction is very clear on how Gournay’s role, and her writings, should be judged: “Heroine of resistance in a time which aims, through the regimentation of language, at the repression of all outward displays of subjectivity, of all ‘caprice,’ as Boileau will say, Marie de Gournay attempts to prevent the final rupture between the dying culture of negotiations among belligerents and the new culture of courtiership” (9).

The shadow or image in Franchetti's title refers not only to Gournay's *Ombre*, which she published at the age of sixty-one, but likewise to what should be Gournay's legacy of linguistic and literary theories on how verbal discourse profoundly communicates human thought and reason, and how it should be used for the highest intellectual purposes. Part 1 treats the linguistic polemics by applying Saussurian theories on language versus speech — in retrospect, to defend Gournay's commitment to writing that retains the power and symbolic value of individual style. Questions of genre and crossing formal conventions are also examined with mostly satisfactory results.

Franchetti's analysis of the social and literary criticism, for which Gournay became so notorious, is defended and justified in the discussion of the *Promenade* and *Of the Equality of Men and Woman* by Gournay's logical precision in forming analogies and the appealing ornaments in her metaphors for morality and language in part 2. This approach is especially effective when used to describe the condition of women and, by implication, the situation facing women writers. The case is therefore made, in Franchetti's exuberant prose, for the consideration of Gournay's feminist discourse to promote women's as well as men's perspectives, equally, as both a logical and an aesthetic course of action "essential" to the continued growth of French letters through crucial stages (173). The case is likewise made for the unapologetic recuperation of Gournay's literary reputation, not only for her generic, philosophical, and poetic creativity, but also for her attention to the ethics of writing, or any art that exists to demonstrate "the attitudes and gestures that expose man's vices" (245).

Franchetti's thematic analysis is still cognizant of the manner in which Gournay's writings have been debated, criticized, and often reduced to feminized and feminist speechifying, in Gournay's time and in ours. Gournay's emphasis on individual style and expressive language is explained by the close relationship between her ethics and her aesthetics, the guiding role of which is centered on the metaphor of how her heart is *épris* (smitten) with morality and good will in both the Christian and the classical sense. While attempting to give a new reading to these rare pieces, this book's argument acknowledges the tribute to Montaigne's *Essays* that runs through Gournay's body of work and is made explicit in her *Promenade of Monsieur de Montaigne*.

The shadow or image that Franchetti attributes to Marie de Gournay is distinctly modern in that it is based on an ethic and an aesthetic that are socially and psychologically empowering for the creative individual and beneficial to society, despite the numerical predominance of obsequious and deceptive flatterers. This book is important not only for reexamining the writings of an historical writer of value and questioning how a controversial woman author's works have been read and evaluated, but as a model example of how to approach the literary, historical, and cultural significance of early modern writings in wider perspective.

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