

Marianne Legault. *Female Intimacies in Seventeenth-Century French Literature*.

Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. ix + 250 pp. \$99.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6945-6.

The focus of this study, and its original contribution to the scholarship on early modern sexuality, is its use of both historical background and current scholarship to support close readings of works that present female intimacy. These readings in turn revise many previous historical and critical assumptions concerning women's friendships and sexuality in the period. The first chapter focuses on philosophical discussions of friendship and their exclusion of women from this relationship, as well as discussions of sexuality that deny the possibility of lesbianism. Sometimes this focus is a bit lopsided. The analysis of Montaigne could have been counterbalanced by a discussion of Marie de Gournay's account of their friendship. For example, Marc Schachter's book *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship* offers an excellent reading of this relationship. Nonetheless, Legault's argument that discussions of friendship and sexuality between women are virtually always inscribed within a particular view of heterosexuality is well founded. Male authors of the seventeenth century reject the possibility of female friendship and love among women, but only after describing such relationships at some length, which suggests the potential threat of these relationships. The final portion of this first chapter focuses on the history of lesbianism. Legault's observations concerning

the erasure of the lesbian in much of modern scholarship about the early modern period, at least until recently, is quite apt, as is her analysis of Jacques Duval's erasure of the tribade (the most common term used to designate a lesbian at the time) by means of redefining Marin/Marie le Marcis as a male hermaphrodite. This analysis would be more complete with the inclusion of Jean Riolan's rebuttal of Duval's claims.

The analysis in the first chapter provides excellent background for the readings that follow. The second chapter, "Female Intimacy in the Masculine Imagination," focuses on Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* and Isaac de Benserade's *Iphis et Iante*. D'Urfé's account of friendship between women offers a perspective that is positive and that reflects both the complexity and reality of such relationships. But eventually female friendship is effaced in favor of heterosexual love, as various friendships between Astrée and her lover, Céladon, disguised as a woman, take center stage. The reader is constantly reminded that it is the male Céladon, underneath the disguise of a shepherdess or druidess, creating a tension between "the recognition of homoerotic relationships between women and the return to hetero-normative values" (89). Benserade's work is less subtle in its denial of the possibility of sexual relations between women. These works provide a strong contrast to the works of Madeleine de Scudéry and Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de La Force, which reverse male-oriented accounts of women's experience. Legault contributes to the already significant scholarship on Scudéry by taking the question of homoeroticism in her works more seriously, for example finding the "passionate female friendship" (138) at the center of a more traditional love story in the novel *Mathilde*. As support for this perspective, she looks at Scudéry's work in the context of the *précieuse* movement, at her rewriting of the Sappho myth in *Artamène*, and particularly at her correspondence with Catherine Descartes on the subject of friendship. Scudéry's revisionist tendencies are noted relative to her rewriting of women's history in *Les Femmes illustres* and her version of the Petrarchan legend of Laura in *Mathilde*. While the outcome in *Mathilde* is scarcely different from that in *L'Astrée*, since the female protagonist marries her male suitor, the events leading to it are quite different, and underscore Scudéry's feminism and profound interest in female friendship. La Force's fairy tale, *Plus belle que Fée (Fairer than a Fairy)*, is a revelation, with its emphasis on powerful women and powerful friendships among women. Both Scudéry's and La Force's works offer a very different perspective on early modern sexuality than is evident in most current scholarship, and our own resistance to particular questions could well be the subject of another study. The wealth of material in this book, and the way in which all the pieces of the argument fit together, make it well worth consulting for anyone interested in early modern women, sexuality, and friendship.

KATHLEEN LONG
Cornell University