

Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larsen, eds. *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*.

Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. xvi + 330 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$124.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6738-4.

This collection of essays turns on its head a commonly held view that learned women in early modern Europe worked in isolation: marvelous prodigies who were excluded from the male-dominated humanist and religious intellectual networks of their day because of their gender. On the contrary, the contributors to this volume argue that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many women participated in, and were a vital part of, a number of familial, religious, and intellectual communities of letters of both men and women across Continental Europe and Britain. This “radical break from preceding centuries” (xvii) that occurred in the sixteenth century was due to the recovery of Latin and Greek classics and the availability and dissemination of the printed book. Female literacy was higher than had been previously thought and aristocratic and even merchant families invested in the education of their daughters. The advent of print meant that by the mid-sixteenth century books written by women, which in previous centuries would have circulated in limited numbers in manuscript, were now disseminated far more widely across Europe. The traveling of women’s writing (including translations of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew texts) across class and national boundaries and the involvement of women and men in literary communities are key themes in this collection. The definition of communities used includes three different aspects: national identity; virtual communities based on shared literary, religious, and professional interests; and communities that share common social and ideological interests, such as convents, literary circles, and religious coteries.

The book contains an impressive array of studies, beginning with a foreword by Diana Robin that sets the scene and an afterword by Margaret Ezell that draws together and discusses the overarching themes of the collection. Both of these vignettes deserved expansion into chapters in their own right. The eleven chapter-length studies discuss French, Dutch, English, and Italian female writers who wrote in their native languages, and sometimes in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and German as well. The collection begins by looking at networks of correspondence between women and men in a section entitled “continental epistolary communities.” Apart from Arcangela Tarabotti, discussed by Ray, who did publish her letters, the trans-Nassau correspondence examined by Broomhall and the correspondence of Pietro Carnesecchi with Giulia Gonzaga were never intended for publication and in

Carnesecchi's case their discovery led to the Roman Inquisition executing him as a heretic. All of the essays in this section focus on the maintenance of an identity through epistolary networks that connect the correspondents with the letter recipients and their wider circle of contacts.

The next section on "textual communities and the uses of print," posits the idea that the writings of early modern women were part of a textual community that consisted of a text, an interpreter, and a public. A book could be considered a "gendered publication" (99) when gender is used as an analytical category to explain the volume's presentation and production. A series of essays then examine a variety of English texts and authors and their different types of texts such as prayers, spiritual writings, emblems, and calligraphy. These authors and their texts crossed national boundaries as well as well as religious and political ones through travel, engagement with a variety of communities, and the circulation of the original works or their later translations or editions.

The last section discusses "constructions of transnational literary circles," where it is the male tutors of young prodigies who spread the word about their charges' abilities through their own travels. The De Roches's catalog of modern female intellectuals from across Europe creates a kind of female textual community through De Roches's identification and promotion in her writings of female intellectuals of her own era. Montaigne's mentoring of Marie de Gournay, Anna Maria von Schurman by Andre Rivet and later by Marie de Gournay as well as Schurman's own mentoring of Marie du Moulin, exemplifies the concept of transnational and transgenerational intellectual families where a protégé seeks an adoptive familial relationship (*familles d'alliances*) with a revered and trusted intellectual mentor.

Overall, this is an impressive work that develops new understandings about the transmission of early modern European women's writings of all genres through their involvement with fellow intellectuals of both genders in transnational communities of letters.

NATALIE R. TOMAS  
Monash University