

Sigrid Ruby. *Mit Macht verbunden: Bilder der Favoritin im Frankreich der Renaissance*.

Freiburg: Fördergemeinschaft wissenschaftlicher Publikationen von Frauen e.V., 2010. 439 pp. €59.90. ISBN: 978-3-939348-18-4.

Sigrid Ruby chooses Anne de Pisseleu and Diane de Poitiers for an investigation of the mistress in French Renaissance visual culture, but she opens her study with the modern royal love triangle that no one anywhere in the Western world could avoid having heard about. Ruby recapitulates the more notorious skirmishes in the war about a mistress that erupted between the British crown prince and his consort, a reminder of the recent past that pulls the reader into the book fully aware — in a slightly embarrassed way — of common assumptions that he or she may share about royal mistresses. Having thus disarmed her reader, Ruby immediately explores and explodes these assumptions in a thoughtful introduction that models how a survey of the literature on a given subject ought to be written. Her survey explains why Ruby appropriates the term *favorite* in her discussion of mistresses. *Mistress* implies that a Renaissance king's female favorite occupied the same position as the later *maîtresse en titre*, and Ruby presents evidence that this was not the case. Precedents for later custom appear only in rudimentary form, such as the passing to Diane of property once given to Anne, an action that indicates similarities in how each woman was perceived but does not reach the open acknowledgment accorded royal mistresses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Further, *mistress* is freighted with sexual, moralizing, and, Ruby argues, misogynistic overtones that get in the way of properly evaluating the roles these women played at the sixteenth-century royal court and how art helped them develop those roles. The designation *favorite* is more typically applied to male courtiers, whose inherently political relationship to a ruler is taken for granted in a way usually denied to a mistress. To represent a woman as a favorite, as Ruby does, underlines the similarly political aspects of her connection to the king and allows parallel insights into both men and women at court.

Ruby's sensitivity to terms is not pedantry or meaningless theorizing, but a signal of the interdisciplinarity of the work she presents here. Ruby places each woman in the political context of her time, showing the strategic considerations involved in her relationship with the king, before discussing literary testimony, as well as commissions of illuminated manuscripts, tapestries, sculpture, and architecture. This method reveals that the physical nature of the relationship between king and female favorite tended to be explicit only in texts. It could, however, also be more or less subtly legible in the assignment of palace apartments

and in the imagery that decorated these spaces. The author focuses on the latter and on Diane's palace at Anet in building an argument for the royal mistress as an active participant in the creation of her own public image, which Ruby calls "staging" (*Inszenierung*). In the course of this argument, Ruby takes a new look at some of the best-known works from Renaissance France. The section on Anne de Pisseleu, for example, includes extensive discussion of her chamber at Fontainebleau, while the *Nymph*, originally from the same palace and later installed at Anet, plays an important part in Ruby's section on Diane de Poitiers. This is much larger than the chapters on Anne de Pisseleu because more of Diane's commissions have survived. Ruby devotes considerable space to a fascinating investigation of the symbolic language in which Diane and Henri II played upon their union, arguing that the imagery differs from that of Anne and François I in part because of the situation in which each woman found herself. Long before her involvement with Henri, the widowed Diane was responsible for upholding the position of an ancient noble family. She created what Ruby terms an "aesthetic profile" of her own, much as her male contemporaries did, and here Ruby's methodology is particularly convincing as she compares Diane with men such as Anne de Montmorency. This book, a solid overview of the activities of two women at an important point in French history, is a valuable contribution to the study of patronage in general and should interest a wide variety of scholars.

MIRIAM HALL KIRCH
University of North Alabama