

Julie D. Campbell. *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe: A Cross-Cultural Approach*.

Women and Gender in the Early Modern World. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006. viii + 222 pp. index. bibl. \$89.95. ISBN: 0-7546-5467-2.

Describing the literary and social interactions within and between romances by Philip Sidney, Mary Wroth, and Anna Weamys, Julie Campbell claims that the authors “spin stories that prolong the dialogic play of literary circles” (167). Campbell’s excellent study engages in a similar project. In five substantial chapters exploring the relationships between literary circles in early modern Italy, France, and England, and texts by the men and women who frequented them, Campbell uncovers a wealth of fascinating detail on the activities and discourses current in these circles. Prompted by the recent interest of women’s and gender studies in manuscript works and their circulation, Campbell provides a remarkably astute and inclusive case study which paints a vivid picture of the worlds within which such works emerged, and convincingly argues the relevance of these worlds to published works by, among others, Tullia d’Aragona, Isabella Andreini, Louise Labé, and Mary Sidney Herbert.

Uniting her discussion of individual works is an extended engagement with the early modern *querelle des femmes*, which Campbell treats as both a literary and a social phenomenon. As such, she describes her goals as, first, “to examine how *querelle* issues were raised, contextualized, and debated in works by male and female writers who were familiar with each other’s views, moved in the same circles, and, in some cases, were writing directly in response to each other’s works,” and, secondly, “to look at a selection of types of women who participated in literary society . . . and how their transgressing of traditional gender boundaries helped to fuel new waves of the *querelle*” (5). As Campbell reenergizes this familiar critical touchstone, she attests to both the enormous influence of the *querelle* in the period, and to the benefits of renewed critical attention to early modern forays into the debate.

One of greatest strengths of this book is Campbell’s insistence on interpreting women’s works in relation to men’s, and she delineates distinct features of specific texts that are too often assumed, rather than shown, to distinguish women’s writing from men’s. Thus, she considers Andreini’s pastoral romance, *La Mirtilla* — expertly translated by Campbell in a 2002 edition from Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies — alongside Tasso’s *Aminta*, showing the

degree to which the woman writer revises and redirects the commonplaces of the genre toward a more positive and empowered portrayal of the pastoral heroine. A fine comparison of Tullia d'Aragona's and Sperone Speroni's dialogues demonstrates how their authors construct different portraits of the courtesan, and Campbell's chapter on Wroth's and Weamys's responses to Sidney's *Arcadia* joins questions of gender and history in order to reveal and account for the differences between Wroth's transgressive text and Weamys's more conservative one.

Throughout these discussions, Campbell's critical sophistication is apparent. She is at ease with works in French, Italian, and English, and shows an impressively vast familiarity with the social and cultural histories of these distinct locations in the period. This is a sound and convincing comparative study, and although its goals and methods are ambitious and demanding, Campbell's linguistic and interpretive skills are very much up to the task. Above all, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe* makes a compelling case for the crosscultural study of early modern works. As Campbell shows, resonances with textual and cultural counterparts can lend familiar works new meanings when set within an international framework, while less familiar writers and works can be incorporated into a larger critical context, which permits a judicious assessment of their contributions to the international debate outlined throughout the book. Campbell's meticulous chapter on the Sidney circle and its Continental influences exemplifies the former case, while her discussion of the central place in Parisian court and literary circles of Claude-Catherine du Clermont, Duchesse de Retz — whose reputation as a writer survives only in the testimony of her contemporaries, since whatever manuscript works she produced are lost — powerfully illustrates the latter.

Campbell's study is equally attentive to the nuances of early modern texts, and to the history and concerns of feminist criticism of the past thirty years. Her book carries forward the implications of several strands of this criticism, while laying a helpful foundation for further studies in the field. This book makes an impressive and valuable contribution to gender studies, and should guide future work in crosscultural and intertextual criticism.

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