

Fend, Mechthild, Melissa Hyde, and Anne Lafont, eds. *Plumes et pinceaux. Discours des femmes sur l'art en Europe (1750–1850)*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2012. Pp. 336. ISBN: 978–2–84066–457–4

Lafont, Anne, ed. *Plumes et pinceaux. Discours des femmes sur l'art en Europe (1750–1850)—Anthologie*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2012. Pp. 551. ISBN: 978–2–84066–458–1

Guentner, Wendelin, ed. *Women Art Critics in Nineteenth-Century France. Vanishing Acts*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013. Pp. 366. ISBN: 978–161149–446–4

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Within the historiography of nineteenth-century art history and criticism, women have habitually been confined to the margins (when their activity has been recognized at all). The editors of these collections set out to rectify this situation in slightly different though overlapping ways, either by highlighting the activity of female commentators on contemporary art exhibited at the Paris Salon, or by reassessing the part played by women across Europe in a variety of discursive forms relating to the visual arts. *Plumes et pinceaux* (together with its excellent accompanying volume of primary texts) examines writers predominantly from France, but also from England and Germany, whose reflections on ancient and modern art took on a variety of forms, from novels and letters to memoirs and travel accounts, as well as more conventional journalistic criticism. Guentner's volume, by contrast, focuses more firmly on female observers of the French art scene, most of whom published in the periodical press, and above all in journals catering expressly to women, a sector that expanded significantly after 1830.

Both collections are dominated by monographic studies of specific writers. *Plumes et pinceaux* originated as a conference on “Historiennes et critiques d'art à l'époque de Juliette Récamier,” held in conjunction with an exhibition on Récamier in Lyons in 2009; *Vanishing Acts* is a collaborative effort between literary historian Guentner and art historians Heather Belnap Jensen and Véronique Chagnon-Burke, who each present essays on two or three critics active between the 1790s and the 1870s. As is inevitable with such collections, overall quality is rather uneven, varying with the insight of individual contributors and the intrinsic interest of the figures they discuss. Nonetheless, both collections offer broad, often challenging, themes that transcend the occasionally pedestrian quality of particular chapters, and encourage the reader to rethink the role played by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women not only in art criticism but in the cultural sphere more generally.

In this respect, Chagnon-Burke is the most probing contributor to *Vanishing Acts*. Her chapters on female critics and painters in mid-nineteenth-century France question *idées reçues* regarding women's access to public culture, stressing the

prominence of female exhibitors in the Salon (though her figures are inconsistent: “at least one third of the artists at the Salon were women” during the July Monarchy [95], a figure that “kept growing throughout the nineteenth century until, at its end, women represented about 22% of the total” [119]). Chagnon-Burke blames modernism, with its hostility to minor genres of narrative painting frequently practiced by women, for the obscurity to which this important aspect of nineteenth-century pictorial production has been relegated. She notes, too, that women also played a small, though significant, role as critics, and were more widely represented within mid-century journalism as a whole than is often recognized.

Chapters by Guentner on critics Claude Vignon and Marc de Montifaud illustrate the point, though as both women’s recourse to masculine pseudonyms attests, acceptance into the male-dominated world of the press imposed a range of practical and discursive constraints on aspiring “femmes de lettres.” In her concluding remarks on female art critics and the ideology of separate spheres, Guentner qualifies Chagnon-Burke’s revisionist stance by emphasizing that “Strict conceptions of gender roles [. . .] highlight the force of character needed for nineteenth-century women art critics to pursue their ambitions, especially outside of the supportive environment provided by the feminine press” (264).

The editors’ introduction to *Plumes et pinceaux* echoes this caution. The French Revolution, they argue, did indeed largely exclude women from its emancipatory sweep. At the same time, however, this very act of suppression fostered a reaction that subsequently informed women’s activities as artists, writers, and intellectuals. Contributors such as Mary Sheriff, writing on the *Mémoires* of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, or Susan Siegfried, in her stimulating discussion of critics in the post-revolutionary women’s press, further nuance this point in exploring overlaps and opportunities that challenged the suffocating ideology of separate spheres. The *Mémoires*, published towards the end of the artist’s life in 1835–1837, present women as active not only as models and patrons, but as playing decisive roles in social and political life. Moreover, Vigée-Lebrun evokes a world at odds with what Sheriff describes as the “modèle unisexe qui fut volontiers adopté par les histoires générales de l’art” and recalls instead “un monde de l’art mixte incluant hommes et femmes.” Siegfried endorses the point, underlining the prominence of women in post-Thermidorian society and demonstrating ways in which women’s magazines (often written by men) display a fascination with female cultural producers. Yet, Siegfried notes, this relative openness proved short-lived: under the Consulate and Empire, as women’s legal status was further restricted by the Code civil, the promotion of women artists in publications such as the *Journal des dames et des modes* was eclipsed by increasing emphasis on the joys of domesticity.

As other contributions to the collection suggest, opportunities for women as cultural commentators often went hand in hand with social privilege. Anne Schroder’s discussion of Félicité de Genlis, Sara Betzer’s article on Marie d’Aguult,

or Satish Padiyar, evoking the more ambivalent case of Juliette Récamier, all present women whose voice was deeply inflected by their élite status. Others, such as the British travelers analyzed by Isabelle Baudino, or the German commentators Helmina von Chézy or Johanna von Haza, were able to use their distance from French society as a platform from which to communicate with their compatriots. In each of these, and other instances, no programmatic, essentialized “feminine” voice emerges, though historically assigned gender roles, either interiorized or resisted, inevitably inform these women’s perceptions both of the world of art and of the world in general. The anthology that completes *Plumes et pinceaux* allows us direct access to these perceptions in a generous selection of writings, supplemented by biographical introductions, iconography, and a detailed bibliography. These texts, many of which are hard to find and some of which are previously unpublished, have also been made available to readers on the website of France’s Institut national d’histoire de l’art (<http://inha.revues.org/2907>), together with an excellent selection of illustrations.

Mariette-Clot, Catherine and Damien Zanone, eds. *La Tradition des romans de femmes. XVIII^e–XIX^e siècles*. Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 2012. Pp.456.

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The title of this volume is an intentional misnomer. As Catherine Mariette-Clot explains in her introduction, one must first constitute a corpus before one can ask whether the label “romans de femmes” serves any useful critical purpose and whether it designates anything approaching a “tradition.” In the ensuing essays as well as in her helpful synthesis, every word in this title is problematized and destabilized; the very notion of uniformity implicit therein is deconstructed. A tradition: who decides and why? What constitutes a “roman de femmes”? What traits, if any, do “romans de femmes” have in common? And what is meant by “de femmes”: simply a novel written by a woman, or one intended for women readers, or rather still one whose outlook, subject-matter, and values, according to publishers and critics, conform to contemporary notions of femininity?

This volume of twenty-four generally first-rate essays, the second in the series, “Littérature et genre,” directed by Martine Reid, was developed from a seminar (2007–2009) and a “journée d’études” (October 2009) organized by the co-editors at the Université Stendhal-Grenoble. They aim to bring this corpus—long disparaged or ignored precisely because it bore the label “romans de femmes” (attributed *a posteriori* by publishers, critics, and literary historians)—to the attention of readers and scholars, to legitimize it by showing that it stands up to and rewards the same serious critical scrutiny accorded to masterpieces by men. In so doing, the editors