

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A NEW CONCEPTION OF WOMEN'S LITERARY HISTORY¹

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European interest in early modern women writers is on the rise. After a period during which research in this field was confined almost exclusively to the English-speaking world and to the American academy, there are signs that this interest is in the process of broadening its geographic scope. Thus, during the last few decades, a considerable number of new histories of women's writing and biographical dictionaries of women authors, as well as anthologies and editions of their works, have been published in continental Europe. Important new histories have appeared of women's writing in the Netherlands,² Hungary³ and Scandinavia,⁴ to name but a few examples – while other countries, notably France, are currently in the process of mapping out this field.⁵ These publications, coming after and confirming earlier

¹ This introduction draws in part on a NEWW (*New approaches to European Women's Writing*) working document, entitled "Going European? Toward a European Women's Literary History. New Instruments – New Materials – New Questions", which we originally drafted in April 2008, and subsequently adapted in response to other NEWW member comments. We gratefully acknowledge their input and the fruitful discussions that helped to shape our document, and especially Suzan van Dijk's first version of it. On the NEWW project, see below.

² In the Netherlands, a major overview of women's writing of the period 1550–1850, entitled *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* (With and without laurels), was published in 1997; an English-language version is currently being prepared. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen R. et al. (eds.), *Met en zonder lauwerkrans. Schrijvende vrouwen uit de vroegmoderne tijd 1550–1850: van Anna Bijns tot Elise van Calcar* (Amsterdam: 1997); see also Schenkeveld-van der Dussen R., "Met en zonder lauwerkrans in an International Perspective", in Dijk S. van – Gemert L. van – Ottway S. (eds.), *Writing the History of Women's Writing. Toward an International Approach* (Amsterdam: 2001) 239–250.

³ Fábri A., *'A szép tiltott táj fele': a magyar trón''ok története két századforduló között (1795–1905)* (Budapest: 1996) ("Toward the Forbidden Ground": A History of Hungarian Women Writers Between Two Centuries.)

⁴ Møller-Jensen E. et al. (eds.), *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria*, 5 vols. (Copenhagen – Stockholm: 1993–1999).

⁵ In France, the *Société internationale pour l'étude des femmes d'ancien régime* (SIEFAR) is currently preparing an online dictionary of French women writers, available at www.siefar.org/DicoAc.html, accessed August 15, 2009.

English-language scholarship, are important as corrections to ‘classical’ European literary history, with its dominance of male canonized authors. Moreover, they often also function as catalysts for renewed scholarly attention to individual women writers and their work. In addition to these historical overviews and anthologies, there is also a growing tendency within continental European scholarship to address more general questions concerning women’s writing, the professionalization of female authors, women’s reading, and the roles played by female cultural transmitters.

Yet despite their undeniable qualities, these historical overviews, anthologies, and more general works often remain traditional in the sense that authors are almost always considered within the limits of a single nation or language area. As such, these new contributions to historical knowledge about the literary past follow the lines of thought that were set out in the nineteenth century, when the nation-state became the dominant framework for the study of modern literatures. Historical questions concerning the professionalization of female authorship are likewise invariably approached from a national viewpoint. In addition, they are addressed with various degrees of intensity and depth in different language areas. Because women writers who wrote in English have been more frequently studied, their cases are also more often presented as examples, while references to (for instance) Spanish-language texts in general discourses on women’s literary history are virtually absent, as Lisa Vollendorf noted some years ago.⁶ The problem is not only that the prominence of one literature implies the neglect of others, but maybe even more so that too many generalizations on women’s writing are made on too restricted a basis. Isabelle Brouard-Arends for example, writing about the French Ancien Régime, makes a statement that is symptomatic of this tendency to generalise: ‘Les livres de femme ont beaucoup été écrits d’abord pour d’autres femmes, complicité affective, mise en commun d’intérêts privés, sentimentaux ou familiaux’.⁷ But in what sense is this impression of writing and

⁶ Vollendorf L., “The Problems and Promises of Early Modern Gender Studies: The Case of Spain”, in *Laberinto* (<http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/laberinto/2002/vollendorf.htm>), accessed July 25, 2009.

⁷ Brouard-Arends I., “Introduction”, in *Lectrices d’Ancien Régime* (Rennes: 2003)10. Her statement, besides, is at odds with Joep Leerssen’s one that ‘everyone agrees that women have been the prime readers in European literary history’. Leerssen J., “Women Authors and Literary History”, in Dijk, *Writing the History* 253 and 256.

reading women clustering together really true for different countries and periods? And does she mean that for women authors gender may necessarily have had a priority above nationality?

Of course, it takes little historical insight to realise that literature was never, really, much of a national product, despite the fact that it was often written in a single, national language. One of the greatest challenges to the growing body of research on women's literature from the early modern period is to transcend the customary national scope and opt for a broader, international approach. A large-scale, international approach of this matter would in fact be in line with the present-day, increasing global awareness in literary studies, and with the publication of books like Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres*⁸ or the earlier *Lettres Européennes. Histoire de la littérature européenne*.⁹ Within a perspective inspired by Bourdieu, Casanova for example argues that 'contre les frontières nationales que produisent la croyance nationale (et les nationalismes), l'univers littéraire produit sa géographie et ses propres découpages'.¹⁰ Nonetheless, gender and international scope seem, in the rest of her argument, to be exclusive categories, for despite her declared focus on 'literary quality and singularity',¹¹ women authors – and early modern authors in general – are conspicuously absent from her 'World Republic of Letters', while on the contrary much lesser-known male authors are given honourable mention. In *Lettres Européennes*, likewise, the gender perspective is not taken into account: among the several dozen authors singled out for individual attention at the end of each chapter, not a single woman is mentioned before the present-day period. This is all the more remarkable for the fact that, to the extent that early modern women participated in international literary movements, from humanism through classicism to early Romanticism, they were active in a literary field that was perhaps, due to the relatively small number of its participants, much more truly transnational than our present-day globalized – and increasingly glocalized – one.

⁸ Casanova P., *La République mondiale des Lettres* (Paris: 1999).

⁹ Benoit-Dusaioy A. – Fontaine G. (eds.), *Lettres européennes. Histoire de la littérature européenne* (Paris: 1992).

¹⁰ Casanova, *République mondiale* 41.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 5.

New Approaches to European Women's Writing

The present volume arose out of what we felt was a need for a more explicitly international or transnational focus in studies of early modern women's writing. At the same time, it seeks to privilege a more sociological approach, rather than one that is based largely on textual analysis. In other words, it aims to provide new insights into women's position in the literary field by emphasising the international scope of their literature and examining their historical position, influence, network and dialogues – leading, in the long term, to different places being assigned to them in literary history. In its aims, this book is part of a larger research programme entitled *New approaches to European Women's Writing* (NEWW), which studies women authors more globally and addresses their different roles as authors, readers and transmitters: their position (as compared to men's) both in the European literary field during their own lifetime and in literary history before 1900.¹² Within this larger project, the cut-off date of 1900 was chosen bearing in mind the rise of international feminist movements toward the end of the nineteenth century. While this development did not necessarily put an end to the older 'querelle des femmes', it did rapidly change the relations between male and female actors in the literary field, necessitating a different kind of historiography.

There are several reasons, however, why an earlier cut-off date would seem as relevant, if not more so, to a new understanding of women's writing. In the first place, much previous research in women's literature, because of its emphasis on English-language texts, naturally concentrated on the so-called 'Golden Age' of English-language women's literature, the nineteenth century.¹³ This led to a somewhat teleological tendency to consider earlier women's writing as a forerunner to the nineteenth-century 'classic' troika Austen-Eliot-Brontës or, as Dale Spender put it in the subtitle of a well-known book, to search for 'good women writers *before* Jane Austen' (our emphasis).¹⁴ While this

¹² For a brief presentation and history of the NEWW project, see Dijk S. van – Gilleur A. – Montoya A.C., "Before NEWW (*New approaches to European Women's Writing*): Prolegomena to the Launching of an International Project", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 27, 1 (2008) 151–157. See also the NEWW website: www.womenwriters.nl.

¹³ The seminal work in this respect was Showalter E., *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: 1977).

¹⁴ Spender D., *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (London: 1986).

teleological tendency has now largely been superseded by more recent scholarship, there is still a need to consider early modern women's authorship in its own right, since it developed in an altogether different context than that underwriting the rise of national literary histories in the nineteenth century. Thus, our approach focuses on the period in literary history before the elaboration of the aesthetic ideology of the individual poet of genius, i.e. the highly gendered model of the modern *poeta vates* that arose in the course of the eighteenth century and still dominates our notion of authorship today. A third reason, finally, why an examination of women's authorship within a specifically early modern setting would seem necessary is the relatively limited scope of the phenomenon of female authorship during the early modern period, as compared to the period starting in the nineteenth century. Fewer authors and a smaller number of readers within national borders necessarily meant that women authors, more often than not, wrote for an expanded, international audience – as indeed did many of their male counterparts. If the unearthing of international or transnational networks was one of our primary goals, then it seemed logical to concentrate, in the present volume, on the period that actually gave rise to the notion of the international 'republic of letters'.¹⁵

The larger NEWW project prepares new historiography in that it explicitly addresses these questions on gender and literature from a comparative and international angle. Indeed, long before the advent of feminist movements,¹⁶ women in different countries – especially women transgressing accepted norms – were conscious of their common preoccupations, sought mutual empowerment by reading each other's writing and sometimes even tried to enter into contact with one another. Many of these contacts are currently being rediscovered, after having been papered over by historiography written within a national framework. In this historiography, images and feelings about national identity tended to play an important role and processes of international cross-fertilization were discounted. But contrary to this narrowly nationalistic view proposed by nineteenth-century historians, for much of the early modern period, authors operated within an international literary field. In particular, for much of this period, Renaissance Italy

¹⁵ See, among others, Fumaroli M. (ed.), *Les premiers siècles de la République européenne des Lettres* (Paris: 2005).

¹⁶ Studied from an internationalist angle in McFadden M.H., *Golden Cables of Sympathy. The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: 1999).

and later classicist France actually fulfilled the function of model – and sometimes, counter-model – for authors elsewhere in Europe. Positive evaluations of French literary culture played an important role in the increasing acceptance of women's authorship, as developed in French *salon* culture, at least until the rise of nationalist movements starting in the late eighteenth century. This is the tendency that was rejected by the proponents of the modern turn toward national frameworks. The case of Gottfried Herder, for example, demonstrates how a search for an ideal of German femininity went hand in hand with his horror of learned women in French culture such as Emilie du Châtelet or Anne Dacier.¹⁷

We are very conscious of the fact that in earlier phases of research on women's writing the international scope was difficult to adopt: earlier scholars had to start somewhere, and existing national historiography was an obvious point of departure. A focus on only one country or language area was further justified by practical reasons and by an established research tradition in literary studies in which the word 'comparative' in 'comparative literature' is, as Gayatri Spivak states, 'more a distinguishing mark than a signifier'.¹⁸ It is only due to the fact that much groundbreaking work has already been done on the individual and national levels that new, broader approaches have today become possible.

An important source of inspiration for our new look at the history of literature comes from the work of Mario Valdés and Linda Hutcheon. Their *Rethinking Literary History* presents a challenge to current literary historiography in that it proposes to shift away 'from the nation-state and therefore away from the usual national historical models based on single ethnicity and single language', and to adopt instead 'a comparative transnational focus'.¹⁹ Their proposal provides a theoretical underpinning to the results of empirical research, that increasingly reveals the existence of ties – 'real' or textual – between early modern women authors operating within different national contexts. In our NEWW database (www.databasewomenwriters.nl), we have undertaken to record all known instances of the reception of works by European

¹⁷ Gilleir A., "‘Doppelter Knoten’. Metaphorik und Geschlecht in Herders literatur- und kulturkritischem Diskurs", *Herder Jahrbuch/Herder Yearbook* 10 (2009) forthcoming.

¹⁸ Spivak G.C., *Death of a Discipline* (New York: 2003) 108.

¹⁹ Hutcheon L. – Valdés M.J., *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (New York – Oxford: 2002) 8, 26.

women authors by other women authors – women translating works by other women, women reacting to their works, women acting as patrons to other women, etc. – in the period before 1900. To date, we have recorded thousands of these ties, suggesting that such links were much more common and much more central to the constitution of a female public space than has as yet been assumed. Multilateral contacts and the necessity of a multi-directional approach are thus suggesting and outlining themselves, as we are discerning international impact and what we might call 'unsuspected networks'. These shed light on international female (publishing) successes on the one hand, and on the other provide an important context for studying women writers in smaller countries, who in numerous cases appeared at first sight to be isolated figures.

It seems to us important not only to approach the literary field from a broader, i.e. transnational perspective, but also to consider the reception of women's writing in their own day in an attempt to estimate women writers' real historical significance. What was their contemporary influence? Which active roles did they play as authors and readers in the broadest sense of the word, i.e. including their roles as transcribers, translators, and mediators? The great importance of these questions – which reminds us of Leopold Ranke's famous dictum that the most reliable evidence concerning past events lies in records created contemporaneously with the events themselves – becomes obvious to anyone considering, for instance, eighteenth-century representations and qualifications of writing women (poetasters, Bluestockings, Dilettantes), and conscious of the fact that those portrayals still influence present-day conceptions of female authorship. For certain periods and cases some revision has been taking place: for seventeenth-century France and salon culture for example, Joan DeJean, going back to contemporary reception and early historiography, set an example which is still to be followed on a European-wide scale.²⁰ For the eighteenth century, Dena Goodman has demonstrated the importance of female mediators in shaping Enlightenment culture.²¹ And for other countries and periods, similar studies are beginning to reveal the various

²⁰ DeJean J., *Tender Geographies. Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: 1991).

²¹ Goodman D., *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca – London: 1994).

roles women played not only as producers of literature, but also as readers, journalists, patrons and translators.

Women Writing Back / Writing Women Back

Our objective in the present volume is, in other words, to enhance our understanding of the part women played – on a collective as well as on an individual level in their dialogues as authors and readers, both among their own sex and with men – in the shaping of the literary field in Europe before 1900. This ‘enhanced understanding’ focuses on the women’s side of what Mario J. Valdés termed the ‘history of literary culture’,²² viewed from a transnational perspective, and the essays in this volume provide insights and single case studies, which in a next phase could be integrated into a more general historiography. This explains the double title of the volume: *Women Writing Back / Writing Women Back*. We wanted not only to present a number of case studies in which women wrote back to a dominant male discourse – an approach already taken by quite a number of studies focusing on women’s participation in the literary field – but more importantly, we also wanted to ask how it would be possible for us today to write women back into literary historiography. In other words, what conceptual tools and theoretical models would be needed in order to write women back into literary history not merely as interesting footnotes or ‘cases’, but actually as an integral part of the early modern literary field? As our subtitle suggests, we felt that a crucial element would be an emphasis on the transnational dimension. Indeed, so long as we continue to view early modern women writers within a narrowly national framework, they will continue to appear as isolated cases, often belonging to no identifiable literary school and lacking the broader resonance of their more well-known male counterparts.

The present volume was thus conceived as a sort of test case: would it be possible, if we asked a number of authors to present the results of their work on a number of case studies of female authorship in different periods, countries and literary genres, to reach some sense of the larger history of women’s writing yet to be written? The volume

²² Valdés M.J., “Rethinking the History of Literary History”, in Hutcheon L. – Valdés M.J., *Rethinking Literary History* 67.

covers a diverse range of national literatures and periods: from Russia to Portugal, and from Spain to Denmark and the Netherlands. This is partly a conscious choice – too often, as we mentioned, generalizations about women's writing are made on the basis of too little evidence – but it is also a reflection of the status of current research, and of its very fragmented nature. As noted, research still tends to concentrate on a few select authors, language areas and genres and as long as these continue to be overrepresented, our view of literary history will remain skewed. In particular, so long as authors writing within smaller language areas are not studied in conjunction with each other, they will most likely remain forgotten. Hence our effort in this volume to pay more attention to some lesser-studied women's literatures, at least from an Anglophone perspective. Thus, Anne-Marie Mai focuses in her essay on sixteenth-century Danish literature, while Vanda Anastácio focuses on eighteenth-century Portugal, Mónica Bolufer on eighteenth-century Spain, and Elena Gretchanaia on eighteenth-century Russia. For some regions, unfortunately, research on women's writing is only now beginning to develop as an independent subfield within the larger field of literary studies. This, too, is reflected in our volume, which has many absences: Eastern Europe is almost completely absent, as are countries such as Greece and Ireland. On the other hand, the large presence of Italy and France in this volume to some extent mirrors the model function these cultures had in Europe from the end of the Middle Ages to the dawn of the modern era at the end of the eighteenth century. The Italian Renaissance, which was so influential in opening new fields of learning to women, as well as seventeenth and eighteenth-century French (salon) culture, are discussed in several articles. France, as frequently pointed out, most recently by Marc Fumaroli,²³ played a central role during more than two centuries in the wider European field, and could therefore not fail to do so in any history emphasizing the role of cultural transfer in the constitution of new literary traditions.

Our volume is divided into three different sections: female spaces, literary genre, and transnational perspectives. The first section clusters contributions in which the foundation of female networks or 'enclaves' for women authors transcending the dominant ideology of female subordination is uncovered. The section on literary genre reveals how

²³ Fumaroli M., *Quand l'Europe parlait français* (Paris: 2001).

different authors in different periods handled genre conventions, tailoring them to their specific themes and positions vis-à-vis mainstream literary life. The transnational perspective, finally, focuses on women authors and their international scope, either on a personal level or as a result of the geographic distribution of their work.

Female Spaces, Female Communities

Although most of the essays in this section start out from a national framework, most also touch on the ways in which transnational influences may have contributed to the formation of local female literary networks, and encouraged the clustering studied by Gerda Lerner. As Lerner states in her historical analysis of the rise of feminist consciousness, the lack of collective expressions of female argument in the course of history certainly has its origin in the omnipresent ideology of female subordination in patriarchal society. ‘The ultimate consequence of man’s power to define has a profound effect on women’s struggle for their own emancipation [...] it has forced thinking women to waste much time and energy on defensive arguments [...]’.²⁴ Religion was one of the spheres which women first tried to reconceptualise so as to be allowed to play ‘an equal and central role in the Christian drama of Fall and Redemption’.²⁵ In a universal Christian culture such as it existed in the late Middle Ages, the creation of a female space automatically implied the transcending of local borders in the light of a greater truth. This is what the first article of this section, Madeleine Jeay and Kathleen Garay’s analysis of the strategies of authorship and readership among mystic women in the later Middle Ages, shows. In spite of the fact that the role of women in official ecclesiastic institutions was extremely restricted due to theological dogma and a lack of education that excluded them from the official *lingua franca*, Jeay and Garay demonstrate that this did not prevent them from speaking or authoring and being listened to, even if they did not write themselves. Spiritual women such as Hildegard von Bingen and Hadewych recorded their visions or wrote poetry in Latin or the vernacular, but

²⁴ Lerner G., *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness from the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York – Oxford: 1993) 10.

²⁵ Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness* 11.

the authorial norm of the life of pious women was written down by a male scribe. Still, a great amount of material reveals women's active involvement in the preparation of their spiritual literature, claiming the authority of the message and thus negotiating their authorship. At the same time, the dissemination of these works, which came to function as *exempla* for other inspired women, happened through both male and female transmission, either written or oral, either in Latin or in a vernacular translation, and made possible the diffusion of the female mystic movement across the European continent through the networks of individuals and communities.

The overview of reading and writing cultures that created some form of intellectual breathing space for women in the late Middle Ages offers a useful point of comparison for the later case of the Danish aristocrat Anne Krabbe, collector and annotator of folk ballads, studied in Anne Marie Mai's essay. Collecting early Danish literature was an aristocratic pastime in her day, yet in the case of Krabbe it was also part of a process of self-fashioning which she started after the untimely death of her husband. Her annotations of the songs and ballads link the fictional plots to the place of her own habitat, transferring art unto the real world and turning the world into an artefact in which she established her own place and created her own history. From this point of view it is interesting to note that Krabbe immersed herself in a world of female protagonists who do not resemble the reformist model of the family mother, as they combine archaic elements of honour, self-defence and revenge. The collector's association with these worlds that were lost but for the presumed place where the stories took place is mentioned explicitly: 'I Anne Krabbe have personally been there'.

Anne Krabbe's aristocratic consciousness is the framework through which she attempted to establish herself within patriarchal society, as did noble women authors in Renaissance England, too. Although some of them, such as Mary, Countess of Pembroke and Mary Cavendish, Countess of Newcastle, showed a strong awareness of the cultural confinement of women, these authors did not use their texts to generate a spiritual or intellectual community for women enabling them to grasp the 'power to define'. This form of intellectual female bonding happened only in the last decades of the seventeenth century, after several women authors had brought women to the forefront in their work in various manners in the course of the century. As in the mystic movement several centuries before, here too the female drive for intellectual emancipation happened within the domain of religion.

Thus in her Passion poem 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' (1611), the poetess Aemilia Lanyer contributes a new element to the portrayal of women in the life of Christ, pictures images of female togetherness and eventually develops her poem into a defence of women. This strand of thought concerning female solidarity developed markedly in the second half of the seventeenth century, when authors such as Bathsua Makin, Mary Astell and Judith Drake published texts in which they defended women's right to education and drew upon mythology and histories of famous women to reinforce their claims. Thus female solidarity developed into an issue in English life and letters, only to disappear at the end of the century for nearly a hundred years.

Vanda Anastácio's analysis of the historical discourse on Portuguese women writers of the eighteenth century also unearths a world of intellectual female activity that was lost in the literary historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose register on femininity was at odds with the phenomenon of intellectually active women. As intellectual and cultural life in Portugal opened up to influences from Europe after the earthquake of 1755, women were allowed more freedom and convents ceased to be the only accepted place for female learning. In secular urban life, the so-called *assembleias* gathered together talented men and women of letters, enabling and reinforcing literary, political and spiritual interchanges in which women took part. Different authors such as the marquise of Alorna, Joana Isabel Forjaz or Francisca de Paula Possollo da Costa wrote and translated a variety of texts and transcended borders in many ways with their oeuvre. However, historiography could not posthumously categorise these 'man-like women', and smoothing over their work in a rhetoric of feminine modesty made us lose trace of them.

Although these four essays all adopt, to a greater or lesser extent, a national framework for their discussion of female communities, all show too how women or female-authored texts that transcended or contested the nation helped women to shape their own aspirations and literary roles. Thus the women mystics studied by Jeay and Garay consciously operated within a European-wide framework, while both the English authors studied by Schabert and the Portuguese women studied by Anastácio drew inspiration from the example set by the highly visible French *salonnières*. Mai offers, on the other hand, an interesting case of a woman author who explicitly sought to position her own work in a local, familial – and thereby again, non-national – context: a topic that surely needs to be explored further for different national literary traditions.

Appropriating Literary Genre

The second section of the volume is perhaps the most traditional, in the sense that the national framework is largely dominant in the case studies examined. It is probably no accident, therefore, that all but one of the articles focus on the two literatures that played a central role in the early modern European literary landscape: those of Renaissance Italy and of seventeenth and eighteenth-century France. Women authors operating in countries with a flourishing literary culture apparently had less need to legitimate their own position by means of mutual feminine empowerment across national borders. Instead, their literature often appears as a subtle play with the conventions of their time, revealing a complex balance between strict poetical rules, processes of imagination and the ubiquitous prejudice against the 'femme savante'.

In his contribution Philiep Bossier analyzes the case of the sixteenth-century poet Maddalena Campiglia, whose literary work should be situated both within the local intellectual landscape of the city of Vicenza and the larger context of Italian Renaissance literature, in order to grasp the intertextual and stylistic strategies which she used to position herself. Campiglia was the author of two pastoral dramas, the new literary genre developed by Torquato Tasso with which, only a few years before, he had defied the restricting dominance of Aristotelian rule in literary practice. As a new and thus non-established literary form, dealing with uncommon themes, the pastoral drama soon became a generic 'free space' for new talent in the literary field such as Campiglia's. The rhetorical language in her *Flori* (1588), especially in the two dedicatory letters preceding the play, reveals Campiglia's command of the dominant rules as well as her – subtle – defiance of the literary establishment; she both uses and names the codes in an ironical way to establish herself as a true author in an otherwise misogynist context.

A skilful battle against the dogmas of her time is also present in the work of another Italian author, Moderata Fonte, whose *Il merito delle donne* (The Worth of Women), published in 1600, entered more explicitly into discussion with her contemporaries in another episode of the 'querelle des femmes'. Yet Fonte's book is not a mere rejection of the subjection of women and praise of female supremacy expressed in the fictional dialogue between the women protagonists. As Meredith Ray shows, Fonte's *Il merito delle donne* also reveals a deep engagement with the medical and scientific discourse that was gaining traction with the new scientific spirit of her day. Based on empirical practice and a

strong attention to the workings of the natural world, this new spirit also allowed for female involvement at various levels. Fonte's text belongs to the tradition of 'books of secrets', in which recipes for all possible ailments and practices, often based on alchemical procedures, were handed down to an increasing – and increasingly female – readership. Moderata offers a strong reply to the rejection of women's involvement in scientific culture, as it had for example been expressed in the work of Ortensio Lando. Lando's *Lettere di molte valorose donne* (Letters of Many Valorous Women, 1548) ostensibly praises female virtue, yet at the same time criticizes the growing tradition of women's involvement in alchemy and natural recipes, which, considering female susceptibility to error, he perceived as a growing threat.

Nina Geerdink's essay on the Dutch poet Katharina Lescaijle, the author of a large corpus of nuptial poems, offers another case of a woman who confidently appropriated and defended her own competence in an otherwise male-dominated field, in this case the poetic genre of nuptial poetry. In a detailed analysis of several of Lescaijle's nuptial poems, Geerdink reveals how she adapted or even inverted several conventions according to the occasion and her relationship to the addressees of her poetry. Particularly conspicuous, for example, are the ways in which in Lescaijle's poetry, marriage appears as a loss of liberty for the bride, thereby subverting the genre conventions of the epithalamion, in which the groom conventionally appears as the one who loses freedom. As conspicuous as this reversal of roles is the way the poems underscore the presence of the poet, proud *auctor* of her own style and message and representative of an ambition and professionalism that did not have their equal in Holland in her day.

Christine Mongenot and Hans Bots 'write back' into literary history Françoise, marquise de Maintenon, the second, controversial wife of Louis XIV, whose image became prey to ideological speculations and forged biographical portraits from the moment she entered the royal court at Versailles as the tutor of the king's illegitimate children in 1661. On the basis of a new and exhaustive edition of her letters, the image of the bigoted Catholic wife, rejoicing at the king's rejection of the Edict of Nantes and the expulsion of the Protestants from France ('hérétiques à l'église'), is replaced by a much more thoughtful picture of the non-recognized queen, urging the king to start negotiating with his foes in order to gain peace. Equally in her letters, Maintenon's pedagogical project at her school Saint Cyr appears as a finely tuned exercise positioned between worldly needs and religious dedication.

Yet these findings do not reveal an unaffected, 'natural' female spirit. On the contrary, they reveal the image of a woman very conscious of her unique position and responsibilities, perfectly in control of the registers of the 'mise en scène scripturale' of her culture. Just as Fonte and Campiglia had done before her, Maintenon succeeded in tailoring the conventions of a (re)nascent, as yet somewhat marginal literary genre – the 'personal' letter – to the needs of her own expression as a female author.

Perry Gethner's analysis of heroic genres, finally, addresses the way in which women authors participated in the canonized literary forms of early modern France, taking into account the weight of French cultural prestige and sense of imperialism associated with them. In spite of this daunting context, several female authors took up this challenge and gained control over symbolically dominant genres such as epic poetry, tragedy and tragic opera, carefully negotiating long and outstanding existing traditions and rigid conventions. Marie de Pech de Calages and Anne-Marie du Boccage adapted patterns of heroism to a more feminine mode in epic poetry. In the case of tragedy, women playwrights, facing the challenge of the strong tradition established by Racine and his peers, as well as a critical audience, had to master convention in order to explore unconventional views. Catherine Bernard was the first woman author whose tragedies were staged at the Comédie Française, featuring female protagonists with a sense of altruism that transcended the traditional male mode of obstinate revenge. Louise-Geneviève de Saintogne composed for the Académie Royale de Musique and transmitted in her operas an image of human imperfection, making all her characters fail to achieve anything glorious. Although the margins within which they operated were extremely narrow, these examples show how women authors succeeded in introducing a distinctly female voice even into the most convention-bound and male-gendered of literary genres.

Transnational Perspectives

After these cases of women authors who made their way into the often densely populated and normative local literary culture, the final section focuses on cases of international dissemination, influence and contact. Bernadette Andrea commences this section with her article on the 'Tartar Girl' and the 'Persian Princess' with a double question: how

did a female sovereign such as Elizabeth I represent herself to foreign Eastern monarchies such as Persia or Turkey without falling back on the Orientalist discourse of her time, and how does one acknowledge the presence or role of displaced subaltern – in this case, female – subjects both in England and the East in the absence of first-person narratives bearing witness to their experiences? The ‘Tartar girl’ is only a brief mention in the list of a colonial expedition, while the Persian princess – Lady Sherley, wife of the Persian ambassador to the English crown – was more amply present in the English imaginative discourse of the seventeenth century. Andrea’s analysis retraces these images back through the works of Mary Wroth, whose controversial literature, she argues, incorporated these foreign aspects, giving these archival absences a distinct textual presence.

Lynn Westwater presents the case of Arcangela Tarabotti, a strictly cloistered Venetian nun whose writings challenged the religious practice of lifelong enclosuring. In her work *Paternal Tyranny*, she protested against this injustice and revealed the economic and political as well as the religious forces that lay behind the practice of forced monachisation. The combative tone of this work complicated its publication in the Venetian republic, and after realising the enormous problems of having her book published in Italy, Tarabotti spent a lifetime of diplomatic contacts and networking in order to have her manuscript circulated and eventually printed abroad. Her first desired country of destination was France, which the author considered a ‘paradise for women’ where the publication of her opus magnum would be greeted positively. Nevertheless it took much effort and a stubborn dedication on her part to get her work published and distributed in Europe.

Ineke Janse shows how the well-known French female educators Françoise de Maintenon, Marie-Thérèse de Lambert and Jeanne Leprince de Beaumont were far from being the only ones exerting their influence across national borders. Others took their cue from them and in fact reinforced their international influence. The case studied here, of Marie-Elisabeth La Fite née Bouée, ties in with the history of the Huguenot diaspora, the Enlightenment spread of educational ideas, and constitutes an interesting case of a ‘modern’ woman writer. La Fite sought financial independence through her work, and also provided an important example to her daughter, who unfortunately did not live past the age of fifteen. In her letters, presented here for the first time, we have a revealing testimony of the mother’s influence.

Rectifying the general image of the muted, marginal and scanty presence of women in Hispanic literary history, Monica Bolufer's contribution deals with the case of the Spanish author and translator Inés Joyes. This middle-class provincial woman of Irish descent, whose presence – or even existence – can barely be recounted through archival sources, translated Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* after an inconspicuous provincial existence in 1798. Joyes did not belong to the brilliant reformist aristocratic circles in Spain, yet her choice to translate Johnson's novel, displaying a disenchanting view of marriage, reveals a liberated spirit, which is underscored by the fact that she added a bold essay of her own to her translation, dealing with women's problematic social and moral situation.

Finally, in the last article of the volume, Elena Gretchanaia documents the important presence in Russia, at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, of French women novelists, whose works were either read in French or in translation. Sources not used up to now, such as library catalogues and private diaries, furnish testimonies of this presence, which could be further documented thanks to large-scale inventories of printed Russian books which include mentions of print runs. It appears that at the time, large numbers of women little appreciated in France and not translated into other European languages, did find their way to Russia. These women were instrumental for the development of Russian literature. Critics such as Nikolai Karamzine and his followers explicitly formulated their appreciation, which, in the first half of the nineteenth century, stimulated Russian women to write novels – first in French and soon also in Russian.

Conclusion: Articulating Female Writing

The present volume thus explores the various ways in which women's writing in the early modern period can fruitfully be approached from a transnational perspective. This transnational perspective can assume the form of a strictly comparative approach – i.e., one where it is *us today* who detect parallels between women writers operating in different national contexts, regardless of whether they themselves may have been aware of such commonality of interests or approaches. Alternatively, it can assume a more historical bias, relying on documentary

and empirical evidence pertaining to these women's biographies or literary contacts. In the former case, the emphasis is on transnational networks of a primarily textual nature, while in the latter it is on historically verifiable, direct contacts between women authors. In either case, the transnational, like a palimpsest, quickly reveals another dimension, that of gender. It was through international contacts, by creating new female networks, that early modern women authors also created something we would call today 'women's writing' – by definition not bound by any national or geographic limitation. It is especially when we juxtapose the works that women produced in different cultural settings that there emerges something like a female literary tradition, and that we begin to perceive common patterns and a set of common questions to which female authors, each in their own local framework, offered their own answers. Yet at the same time, these shared patterns displayed a wide range of variation. While the Portuguese authors discussed by Anastácio and the Russian ones discussed by Gretchanaia, for example, certainly drew inspiration from their French counterparts, yet they also sought to position their own works against those more prestigious ones, creating distinct national inflexions. Likewise, the category of gender should not obscure the existence of other relations of subordination, as underlined by Andrea in her discussion of the Tartar girl or by Perry Gethner in his account of the way in which French women writers participated in an imperial discourse. Thus, perhaps just as importantly, it is not only common patterns, authorizing strategies and thematic concerns that emerge but also the existence of the dialogue itself. For a transnational approach is not a reductionist exercise, reducing a diversity of female texts and approaches to a single common denominator. Rather, it foregrounds the multiplicity of discourses in which women engaged, while yet retaining – in some cases, quite consciously – a shared sense of participating in a common literary field. This sense of difference within unity is aptly described by the concept of 'articulation', in the sense not only of verbal utterance, but also of the concerted movement of two body parts which, while moving in separate directions, yet come together at a joint. As described by Stuart Hall, this sense of articulation is:

not that of an identity, where one structure perfectly recapitulates or reproduces or even 'expresses' another; or where each is reducible to the other. [...] The unity formed by this combination or articulation is always, necessarily, a 'complex structure', a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities.

This requires that the mechanisms which connect dissimilar features must be shown – since no ‘necessary correspondence’ or expressive homology can be assumed as given. It also means – since the combination is a structure (an articulated combination) and not a random association – that there will be structured relations between its parts, i.e., relations of dominance and subordination.²⁶

Understanding early modern women's writing as a form of ‘articulation’, then, means both understanding how they used their writing to ‘articulate’ different, sometimes seemingly incompatible norms – as in the case of Françoise de Maintenon, ‘articulating’ an epistolary *persona* that was both worldly *salonnière* and pious queen – and resituating their literary texts within the context of the transnational dialogue that produced them. As Bossier aptly puts it in his discussion of Maddalena Campiglia, it meant that women authors were sometimes in the situation of saying ‘yes’ and ‘no’ at the same time. Or in other words, to take up Susan Lanser's productive concept, women's writing reveals once again its fundamentally ‘double-voiced’ nature.²⁷ ‘Writing back’, in this sense, meant for these women not opposing a new, authoritative discourse to an older one, but rather bringing different discourses together, and ultimately creating a sense of gender identity that acquired its meaning not from a sense of national sameness, but transnational difference.

²⁶ Cited in Edwards B.H., “The Uses of Diaspora”, *Social Text* 19, 1 (2001) 59. Edwards' discussion, here and elsewhere, of the way in which the concept of ‘articulation’ can be applied to transnational contacts between black authors in the early twentieth century is particularly suggestive.

²⁷ Lanser S.S., *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca – London: 1992).

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