

## Christiansen on Del Lungo and Louichon, eds. (2013)

Del Lungo, Andrea, et Brigitte Louichon, eds. *La Littérature en bas-bleus. Tome II: Romancières en France de 1848 à 1870*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013. Pp. 323. ISBN: 978-2-8124-1392-6

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This sequel to the 2010 volume on the Restoration and the July Monarchy, the era when the figure of the *bas-bleu* emerged and then became a type, sheds welcome light on a period that has tended to get short critical shrift, as is evidenced by the plethora of unfamiliar writers featured in these studies. Martine Reid's introduction traces the use of the term *bas-bleu*, identifies the women it designated, and lays out fascinating statistics on the dearth of references to Second Empire women writers in literary histories—even some very recent ones. The rationale for their exclusion is often their “minor” status, even while “une foule d’auteurs masculins parfaitement mineurs” (14) regularly find their way in.

While it is always difficult to single out individual essays, especially when they are uniformly of such high quality, several merit special mention, such as the opening piece by Andrea Del Lungo, whose examination of Barbey d’Aurevilly’s “attaque venimeuse et caustique” (40) on *bas-bleus*, in tandem with co-editor Brigitte Louichon’s essay on Eugène Sue’s *La Femme de lettres*, sets the stage for the remaining contributions on women writers. Del Lungo recommends that we read Barbey’s 1878 *Les Bas-bleus* as “une défense désespérée visant à protéger un territoire, celui du roman, comme garantie, ou peut-être comme dernier emblème d’une domination masculine [. . .]” (40-41), and suggests that Barbey’s misogyny may ultimately matter less than the fact that he considered women writers worthy of attention at all: “Attaquer les *bas-bleus*, signifie admettre non seulement qu’elles existent et qu’elles hantent l’écrivain nostalgique d’un ordre disparu, mais aussi qu’elles ont réussi leur pari” (41).

Many of the most interesting contributions have in common a focus on women who, in the face of myriad obstacles, found ways to carve a niche for themselves in a literary world seemingly intent on excluding them. Lise Manin considers Amélie Bosquet’s strategies for overcoming the double handicap of being a woman and not being from Paris (she published flattering articles in the regional press on authors who might prove useful to her, for example, and situated herself among fellow Normandy folklorists). Manin’s analysis of Bosquet’s letters unveils “la façon dont une obscure femme auteur de province se donne en représentation sur la scène épistolaire et est perçue en retour” (83). Gilles Béhotéguy scrutinizes Zénaïde Fleuriot’s efforts to navigate the minefield that was novel writing by informing her “historiettes” or “petits livres” (she claimed never to have written, or even read, novels) with “la force et la forme du témoignage, le cachet du vécu” (172), the result being that “la dangerosité du roman semble [. . .] désarmée par l’effet de proximité de ce bavardage confidentiel et le discours féminin y gagne en authenticité” (173). Fleuriot compensates somewhat for having her girl heroines become women “au prix d’un lent effacement et d’une constante souffrance dans un triple martyre: sacrifiée comme fille, soumise dans le mariage et immolée dans la maternité” by including as well “une autre catégorie de personnages féminins: les femmes devenues autonomes par le fruit de leur travail” (171), and by making a stock character like *la vieille fille* “un idéal féminin” rather than a monster (170). Laurence Chaffin, for her part, demonstrates that although the genre of *romans de poupée* involved forming “l’esprit des lectrices [. . .] dans une perspective normative et conforme à l’idéologie dominante,” it also represented “un lieu adapté pour être un auteur sans en avoir l’air” (195). “[É]crire pour la jeunesse,” she contends, “c’est écrire sans écrire” (194). Finally, Yvan Daniel provides compelling evidence for awarding Judith Gautier, known for her novels set in exotic locales like China and Japan, the title of “romancier parnassien.” By injecting excerpts from poems into her prose (“l’incrustation poétique” [299]) and poets into her cast of characters, by cultivating “la pose de l’impassibilité parnassienne” (302) and, most notably, by creating “de vastes tableaux poétiques, originaux ou inouïs pour le lecteur de l’époque” (300), Gautier was able to “faire oublier aux parnassiens l’utilisation de la prose, d’emblée mésestimée” (299).

Other essays treat Sand, la comtesse de Ségur, Marie-Laetitia Bonaparte-Wyse, Claude Vignon, Virginie Ancelot, Fanny Villars, Elizabeth Celnart, Amable Tastu, Fanny Richomme, Sophie Ulliac-Trémadeure, Victorine Monnot, André Léo, Daniel Stern, Olga de Janina, la comtesse de Boigne. . .—writers who, thanks to fine studies like these, may finally emerge from the oblivion to which literary histories have long relegated them.

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