

Nineteenth-Century French Studies

A scholarly journal devoted to the study of French literature and related fields

For articles: ncfsarticles@gmail.com

For reviews: ncfsreviews@gmail.com

www.ncfs-journal.org

Smart, Anne K. *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France*. University of Delaware, 2011. Pp. 272. ISBN: 978-1611493542

Yaël Schlick, *Queen's University*

Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France focuses on Enlightenment and revolutionary texts to reconceptualize notions of female citizenship by demonstrating that women possessed a civic identity in the home and practiced it in their capacity as mothers. Altering the concept of citizenship—not defining it exclusively as an individual's right to exercise political power through the right to vote, for example—enables Smart to call those women “who act for the public good as members of the nation” (9) *citoyennes*, and to constitute the home as a sphere neither separate from nor strictly opposed to the public sphere of politics. At its heart, this book argues against the notion of separate and gendered spheres, nuancing the categories of the domestic and public spheres as influentially developed in Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Smart questions Habermas's categories and suggests that the *citoyenne* “acts as the linchpin for the ideal state grounded in the principles of social contract and equality” (3). This claim, as well as the contention that women participated in the public sphere through their inculcation of civic virtue from within the home, is made throughout the work.

Citoyennes follows a chronological trajectory tracing these ideas by examining the figure of the mother in writings by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Félicité de Genlis, and Olympe de Gouges, and by analyzing prerevolutionary paintings by Jacques-Louis David, speeches discussing the abolition of women's clubs, Jacques-Philippe Lesueur's watercolors and three vaudeville productions from Year II of the Republic. In each chapter, Smart investigates the figure of the mother to show how these works locate her at the center of a discourse about civic values and virtuous acts. This chronological approach has the interesting effect of suggesting a continuity between the Enlightenment and revolutionary periods. In the first three chapters (on Rousseau, Mercier, and Genlis), where the analysis focuses on cultural representations of women, there is not as strong a sense of how the various educational or utopian visions translated on the ground. This gap between literary and artistic representations of women's civic identity and women's lived experience is better bridged in the last three chapters and particularly in the final one, where Smart considers the role of the audience in her discussion of vaudevilles. With their variety of evidence and sources, the last two chapters are rich and suggestive about how such ideas played out in actual lives.

Citoyennes offers a convincing argument sustained throughout the book. Yet, although it includes insightful readings of the texts under consideration, I found that two central issues were not adequately addressed. The first is the question of the slippage among the terms “mothers,” “women,” and “*citoyennes*.” The book moves often among these terms as if they were synonymous. From its title, the reader expects the book to be about women generally; indeed, the book's back cover asks: “Did women have a civic identity in eighteenth-century France?” But Smart's actual focus is on civic identity as it pertains to *mothers*. The significance of the difference between “mothers” and “women” in her study warrants discussion. The reader may well wonder whether (and how) women who were *not* mothers accessed civic identity, or what the implications of the centrality of motherhood to the formation of women's civic identity might be. Was it only or primarily through their role as mothers that women were able to access civic identity and thus to be considered as *citoyennes* in this study?

Secondly, *Citoyennes* does not sufficiently consider the nature of the politics comprising these various mothers' civic values. Smart notes throughout the book that the home is too often depoliticized, that it was indeed the site of civic experience, that Habermas's model restricts citizenship to the public sphere, and that the definition of citizenship must include the intimate sphere. These ideas are addressed fully in the introduction and reiterated in subsequent chapters. I wish, however, that Smart had gone further to investigate the actual politics that made up civic identity for women. In some instances, the nature of women's civic identity seems quite prescriptive and conservative (e.g. *Adèle et Théodore*), approaching traditional notions of feminine virtue; in others (e.g. *Intérieur d'un ménage républicain*) they have a decidedly Republican and revolutionary content. In her conclusion, Smart writes that "All the female figures we have seen, from Rousseau's civic mother to the heroine of Saint-Mithier, have been presented as members of the nation who are devoted to perpetuating the ideals of the state" (239-40), but these are very different ideals and very different states. Instead of discussing the content of such ideals and the nature of those civic values, Smart reiterates their structural similarity. There is a problematic leveling in suggesting that Félicité de Genlis and Olympe de Gouges somehow represent the same kind of ideas about women's role in society, something we would not likely accept in a comparison, say, between Sarah Palin and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Analysis of the differences that underlie structurally similar notions about women's civic identity would have provided readers with a stronger sense of the multiple, competing, and even contradictory ways of being a *citoyenne* in eighteenth-century France.