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Zayde (review)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, Comtesse de Lafayette. *Zayde*. Nicholas D. Paige, ed. and trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. 210 pp.

Lafayette's *Zayde* (1670–71) is a fascinating text that has drawn increasing critical attention over the past ten years. It is an excellent example of a hybrid text and as such of interest to scholars of romance as well as to specialists of the novel. Its use of an exotic locale has also led scholars to delve into Lafayette's take on "orientalism." The actual production of the text has also elicited critical commentary. *Zayde* is a good example of the collective writing that occurred in the salons of the period. The novel's original preface, composed by Pierre-Daniel Huet, was a scholarly treatise on the novel genre. La Rochefoucauld and Segrais also participated in the novel's composition. This is a work that can be used in a variety of classroom settings, such as courses on romance, the development of the novel, print culture, courses in women's studies, and on early conceptions of "orientalism." It is especially valuable as an example of romance because it contains all the characteristics of the genre without the excessive number of pages of traditional romances. While one can't teach *L'Astrée* or any of Scudéry's massive works such as *Clélie* or *Le Grand Cyrus* in their entirety, one can teach *Zayde* as a romance and thus give students a sense of the changes in narrative form over the course of the seventeenth century.

Nicholas Paige's English edition is thorough, painstakingly produced, accurate, nuanced, and elegant. It is quite simply a model translation of a difficult text. He is to be congratulated for making Lafayette's complex prose so readable and clear. It is truly a pleasure to read this translation. Paige captures the different registers of the French very well, and is especially adept at bridging the gap between the seventeenth century and the twenty-first without losing any of the necessary elegance and complexity of the original French. This is quite a feat. It is clear that this edition was produced by an eminent

scholar of seventeenth-century France as well as someone with an exemplary sense of the classical French lexicon. Paige's introduction is an excellent overview of the novel's context. It provides the reader with everything s/he needs to know to appreciate the work. Paige correctly accentuates the romance characteristics as he underscores the differences between *Zayde* and the traditional romances that preceded it. The translation is lucid, imminently readable, and enjoyable. The footnotes are all concise and very useful. Particularly noteworthy are Paige's explanations of the choice of various words and the inclusion in the notes of the original French. Paige has an excellent sense of seventeenth-century French usage and of the difficulty of translating concepts such as "esprit" and "repos." His explanations are clear and convincing and help one to understand the text better.

Paige has done a wonderful service by translating this original and intriguing work into English. His translation opens the door for *Zayde* to be incorporated into history and literature courses, as well as women's and gender studies courses. *Zayde* can be profitably used in conjunction with a number of the other texts in Chicago's "Other Voices" series, such as Montpensier's correspondence with Motteville, Scudéry's *Histoire de Sapho*, and Villedieu's *Désordres*. In addition to its obvious pedagogical value, *Zayde* is quite simply a great story that deserves to be known by a much wider audience than is currently the case. Paige's work will surely make this possible.

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Rachel Mesch. *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006. 268 pp.

Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, Marcelle Tinayre, Renée Vivien, Liane de Pougy, Odette Dulac—these are not exactly household names in the French literary canon. In *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle*, Rachel Mesch does much more than rescue these women writers from scholarly oblivion. Mesch argues that through the development of a counter-discourse, these and other women writers successfully challenged the prevailing assumptions