

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Selected Philosophical, Scientific, and Autobiographical Writings

Jess Allen

Volume 42, numéro 3, été 2019

Situating Conciliarism in Early Modern Spanish Thought
Situier conciliarisme dans la pensée espagnole de la première modernité

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066399ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066399ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Allen, J. (2019). Compte rendu de [Selected Philosophical, Scientific, and Autobiographical Writings]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42(3), 264–266. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066399ar>

Thiroux d'Arconville, Marie-Geneviève-Charlotte.

***Selected Philosophical, Scientific, and Autobiographical Writings.* Ed. and trans. Julie Candler Hayes.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 58 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies Series 522. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018. Pp. xv, 243. ISBN 978-0-86698-578-9 (paperback) US\$44.95.

In *Selected Philosophical, Scientific, and Autobiographical Writings*, Julie Candler Hayes, a scholar of the French Enlightenment, provides both the first English translation and the first reedition of a selection of Marie-Geneviève-Charlotte Thiroux d'Arconville's (1720–1805) work. Primarily an autodidact, D'Arconville was a keen reader and writer as a child. After marrying Louis-Lazare Thiroux d'Arconville, a magistrate in the Parlement de Paris, at the age of fourteen and bearing three sons, she set about educating herself more broadly while participating in the intellectual and social life that her social position granted her. Beginning with translations of English scientific treatises into French, d'Arconville published anonymously during her lifetime, and today she is relatively unknown to all but a handful of specialists; this volume therefore constitutes a much-needed introduction to her work. Published under The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series, which aims to rediscover and stimulate further work on texts by early modern women, the volume is in dialogue with Hayes's own recent work on Enlightenment women and the general, ever-growing interest in women's writing and issues surrounding gender.

Hayes admires d'Arconville's extensive range of interests and her intellectual independence, citing these as key reasons for which d'Arconville merits our attention, for they distinguish her from several of her contemporaries. Representing these interests in a single volume consisting of excerpts chosen from hundreds of essays presents no small task, yet Hayes manages this with aplomb. The first part contains writing published by d'Arconville during her lifetime. Hayes's brief histories of editions and prefaces accompany the texts about science: her translation of Peter Shaw's work, *Lectures on Chemistry* (1759), her translation of Alexander Monro's work, *Treatise on Osteology* (1759), and her *Treatise on Putrefaction* (1766) in which she strikes out alone, responding to the work of John Pringle. We get a taste of her history writing in

her prefaces to *The Life of Marie de Médicis* (1774) and *The History of François II* (1783) and become privy to her views pertaining to contemporaneous social issues in segments about self-love, the passions, women, and marriage, taken from *Thoughts and Moral Reflections* (1775), and to friendship in *Treatise on Friendship* (1775). Hayes's introduction and prefaces map d'Arconville's views in relation to those of her contemporaries, relating, for example, her moral philosophy to its predecessors, including the seventeenth-century *moralistes*. Several potential future studies of d'Arconville spring to mind as we become acquainted with her intellectual dialogues and network.

The second part turns to some of d'Arconville's later works chosen from the manuscripts of *Thoughts, Reflections, and Anecdotes* (1801–05), which she elected not to publish; they are housed today at the University of Ottawa. According to Hayes, d'Arconville presents herself powerfully in her autobiographical writings, of which "The Story of My Childhood," "The Story of My Writing," "My Memories," and "About Me" feature in this volume, for it is here that we really see her personality shine through. Hayes juxtaposes these with a series of treatises offering reflections on topics such as marriage, self-love, and, notably, the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, making sure to contextualize d'Arconville's take on Rousseau in relation to that of her contemporaries.

Indeed, her engagement with d'Arconville's views on women is particularly effective: Hayes is determined to let her protagonist drive the narrative, emphasizing the complexity of her views on women and ensuring that we read them in line with the specificity of the societal norms that d'Arconville is criticizing and her religious and philosophical points of view. It would be easy to label her according to our own feminism, but Hayes's brief account resists this tendency, encouraging us to fully appreciate the richness of the following text.

Some readers might feel the lack of parallel French text; otherwise, the extracts flow smoothly in chronological order, reading as though they are an expansive response to the opening of Hayes's introduction, where she cites the first published biography of d'Arconville, taken from a footnote in the work of physician Pierre-Henri-Hippolyte Bodard de la Jacopière when he brings up her work on putrefaction. From her wit and gift for friendship to her extensive knowledge, he has nothing but praise for her. Hayes's presentation of d'Arconville echoes these sentiments: she keeps her prefaces short but effective. Pointing out small details about d'Arconville such as her attentiveness

in revising her translations of the scientific texts and the language she uses to convey her arduous desire for knowledge in her autobiographical pieces animates the prefaces and translations alike, adding a personal touch and leaving us wanting to learn more. This is a particular strength of the edition: Hayes allows d'Arconville to tell her own story and, in turn, to shape the scholarly narrative that she begins to construct.

JESS ALLEN

University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

Vintenon, Alice, and Françoise Poulet, eds.

La Réforme et la fable. Preface by Frank Lestringant.

Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance 155. Geneva: Droz, 2018. Pp. 517. ISBN 978-2-600-05942-8 (paperback) CFH 52.

This collection gathers nineteen essays originally presented at a colloquium at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne in December 2015. “Fable” is understood broadly, extending from the animal fables of Aesop, to myths, parables, emblems, apologues, fantasies, *somnia*, and fiction generally, with frequent slippage between them. Readers need to be attentive to which kinds of fable are in play in the essays. Only one essay—Biscéré’s—is concerned with the Aesopic corpus. All parts are in French.

The volume recaps Reformers’ mistrust of fables. For some Reformers, a fable was “le mensonge, une faribole, une affabulation” (316); for others, it was ideal for satire and poetry. Reformers cited the Bible (especially 2 Peter 1:16 and Timothy 4:3–4) and Plato’s *Republic* (377b) to condemn fables, but even Reformers knew well enough that the Bible had fables, too, e.g., 2 Samuel 12:1–7 and Matthew 7:15.

Isabelle Pantin’s “Melanchthon et les fables païennes” shows why early Reformers accepted some fables while reviling others. Melanchthon scorned misbehaving gods and goddesses, but recommended the fables of Aesop for teaching rhetoric and morals. Pantin’s essay leads nicely to everything that follows. “Ovidii (ut ita Dicam) Chronicon” by Céline Bohnert reviews the *Fabularum Ovidii Interpretatio* (1555) of Georg Schuler, or Sabinus, a Melanchthon disciple. Shuler demonstrated how Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* could