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SIEFAR Société Internationale pour l'Etude des Femmes de l'Ancien Régime [International Society for the Study of Women of the Ancien Régime] <http://siefar.org/en/>

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Early Modern Women

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Cover: Portrait Medal of Isabella d'Este. 1495–98. Gold with diamonds and enamel, diameter 7 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

SIEFAR Société Internationale pour l'Etude des Femmes de l'Ancien Régime
 [International Society for the Study of Women of the Ancien Régime]
<http://siefar.org/en/>

A decade ago, Kate Chedgzoy called for scholars of early modern women's writing to expand their critical horizons by paying attention to the transnational dimensions of women's cultural production. Early modern women, she reminded us, were attuned to the state formation, shifting national boundaries, and "the new geographies" of their changing world. So we, too, as critics, should become travelers adopting "a more expansive cultural geography, which would locate it in a more internationalist and comparative context."¹

Familiarizing oneself with SIEFAR and its website offers just such an opportunity. SIEFAR is the European/French equivalent of the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women. Founded in 2000 by a group of French and international scholars, SIEFAR was developed and ably directed by Éliane Viennot, its first president, and a committee of scholars of early modern French women. Viennot, who is Professor of French Renaissance at the University Jean Monnet (Saint-Etienne), and honorary member of the Institut Universitaire de France (2003–13), was recently awarded the French Legion of Honor. As a specialist on Marguerite de Valois and other female rulers during the Renaissance, Viennot has written extensively on the historiography of power relations between the sexes over the *longue durée* and on the masculinization of the French language from its inception to recent times. A prolific author, she has taken part in the campaign for female political parity in France and the integration of gender studies into French university curricula. Viennot's scholarly and political contributions have thus shaped the creation and contour of SIEFAR and its website.

To facilitate the work of French and international scholars, SIEFAR has five broad objectives:

- Document the lives, work, engagement, and writings of all women whose life stories are connected in some way to France (as inhabitants, sojourners, expatriates, workers, writers, translators, scientists, artists, and political figures).

¹ Kate Chedgzoy, "The Cultural Geographies of Early Modern Women's Writing: Journeys across Spaces and Times," *Literature Compass* 3.4 (2006), 891.

- Uncover still relatively unknown contributions by women to historical, economic, political, intellectual, scientific, and artistic trends and developments.
- Foster archival research, gender/genre analysis, and interdisciplinary studies to ensure that these contributions *not* be neglected, underappreciated, or expunged from collective historical memory.
- Showcase the research of women scholars.
- Publicize national and international conferences to attract and encourage international collaboration.

To these ends, SIEFAR has created a dual language (French/English) website dedicated to the study of *ancien régime* women, which features several continuously expanding rubrics. Many of these are particularly useful for the readers of *Early Modern Women* and include the following:

- A bilingual *Dictionnaire* of *ancien régime* women.
- **Online Resources** in history, literature, the social sciences, music, philosophy, and theater; online bio-bibliographies of women from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century; critical works on women from the medieval period to the twenty-first century, several of which are accessible online; and studies on catalogs of famous women.
- **Current topics** such as “*La Guerre des mots*” (The War of Words); “Revisiting the *Querelle des femmes*”; recent debates in the French press and academic circles over Mme de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) and the French Renaissance poet Louise Labé (c. 1520–66); and the place of *ancien régime* women in current children’s literature.
- **Monthly Current Events** in the form of calls for papers, international conferences, seminars, publications, exhibits, shows, Ph.D. theses completed or in progress, and other announcements.

- An extensive **Repertory** of publications of scholars from over twenty countries who are currently working on early modern women.
- A **Listing** of awards, fellowships, teaching positions, and research opportunities.

Transnational Research

For those interested in cross-cultural and transnational research, the *Dictionnaire* of *ancien régime* women is a good starting place. Of the 1832 female queens, women religious, writers, thinkers, artists, scientists, and *salonnières* listed, 664 have a complete bio-bibliographical entry. While the majority are dedicated to French women, such international luminaries as Anne Boleyn, Catherine II of Russia, the opera singer Francesca Caccini, the actress Isabella Canali (or Andreini), and many others are treated in well-developed and highly useful descriptions. These entries offer a biography, list of works, selected secondary sources, iconography, web resources, and reception, as well as the early modern bio-bibliographies in which the entry bearer appears. This last feature is particularly useful, as it allows for researching diachronically the reception of any given *ancien régime* woman. About 131 entries are currently being written, while 1174 names are still without entries. SIEFAR actively invites scholars to contribute to these entries.

The Online Resources in history, literature, music, theater, and philosophy repay consultation. While a number of them need updating, several provide good teaching and research materials. The historical sites include, for instance, "Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index (The Medieval Feminist Index)" which since 1996 indexes 500 journals in all fields and disciplines related to women, from 450 C. E. to 1500 C. E., and Russia to 1600. The "Cour de France" (The Court of France) section is a valuable interdisciplinary trilingual site (in French, English, and German) on the royal courts of France, featuring publications on all aspects of the French court (daily life, art, culture, history, and iconography). The literary sites are in the majority and include, for instance, "Web 17," a project launched in 1998 by the late Roger Duchêne that features his works on seventeenth-century French women writers, most notably Mme de Sévigné. SIEFAR could include as well the great sequel to the site, the current SE17 portal for the North American Society for Seventeenth-Century French Studies, founded by Francis Assaf at the

University of Georgia (<http://se17.bowdoin.edu/>). Exceptionally useful is the “Bibliografía de Escritoras Españolas” (Bibliography of Spanish Women Writers, or BIESES), a project- and a data-based site dedicated to Spanish women writers from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century that also organizes numerous conferences (<http://www.bieses.net/>). [See the review in this issue.]

“Les Contes de fée du dix-septième siècle” (Fairy Tales of the Seventeenth Century) documents seven of the most important women writers of fairy tales in France (Mme d’Aulnoy, Mme de Murat, Mme d’Auneuil, Mlle L’Héritier, Catherine Bernard, Mlle de La Force, and Mme Durand), along with fine selections and transcriptions of their tales. “Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Latin Letters,” covering the fourth to thirteenth century C. E., was compiled and translated by Joan Ferrante and includes information on the senders and receivers of the letters, their translations, the original Latin, manuscript sources, and dates. “Women Writers and their Public before 1900” was started by Suzan van Dijk of the Huygens Institute in the Netherlands as “Women Writers’ Networks: Internet and the Gendered Study of Women’s History” (<http://www.womenwriters.nl/>). It is paired here with the recently created “New Approaches to European Women’s Writing,” or “NEWW Women Writers,” which features the reception of women’s printed books and manuscripts from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century.

SIEFAR’s Online Resources not only represent literature and history, however. Theater resources include, for example, “Théâtre de femmes de l’Ancien Régime,” the companion site to the five published anthologies of plays by French women from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries under the direction of Aurore Evain, Perry Gethner, and Henriette Goldwyn. Philosophy resources feature the “Project Vox” from Duke University which provides a basic introduction to the works of philosophers Margaret Cavendish (1623–73), Anne Conway (1631–79), Damaris Masham (1659–1708), and Émilie du Châtelet (1706–49), as well as offering recent course syllabi on early modern philosophy and women philosophers.

Equally helpful are references to catalogs of works by famous women from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century, and to bio-bibliographers of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries whose compilations of *femmes illustres*, *femmes savantes*, and *femmes célèbres* include those of Hilarion de Coste (1647, 2 vols.), Marguerite Buffet (1668), Philibert Riballier and Charlotte-Catherine Cosson de La Cressionnière (1779, with some 400 entries), P.-J. Boudier de

Villemert (1779, 270 brief entries), and Fortunée Briquet (1804, 600 entries). Also included are catalogs on famous women artists by André Félibien (1668), R. de Piles (1715, 3 entries), Abbé L.-A. de Fontenay (1772, 2 vols.), Nicolas Guérin (1715, 5 entries), and P.-M. Mariette (1851–53, 9 entries). Access to these online resources is helpful in comparing and contrasting the entries of the bio-bibliographers with each other.

Current topics of interest on the website include “The War of Words,” “Revisiting the *Querelle des femmes*,” and the recent debates in France on Mme de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves*, and Louise Labé. “The War of Words” refers to the debate initiated by French feminist critics in the early 1970s over the gender of words, particularly those relating to the professions that are usually gendered masculine. By contrast to many other French-speaking countries that apply the feminine endings of such words in daily usage, in France there has been an institutional resistance to such gender parity. SIEFAR’s rubric indicates that the feminine gender of many French words now deemed strictly masculine existed in medieval and early modern times, and that certain common and proper nouns, pronouns, and adjectival forms of verbs also possessed a feminine ending in the past. The site lists these feminine endings and the etymology of common professions, and includes current criticism of their recently feminized forms. For instance, *écrivaine*, the feminine of *écrivain*, or male writer, was used as far back as 1396. In 2006, however, a French critic published a scathing article in the French press protesting the “pseudo-feminism” of the word, which, he disdainfully added, was “imported from Quebec.” The entire rubric makes for quite entertaining reading.

“Revisiting the *Querelle des femmes*” is a terrific addition to the site. It originated in a series of three international conferences organized by SIEFAR and Columbia University in Paris, each covering separately the periods 1750–1810, 1600–1750, and 1400–1600; a fourth conference on the *querelle* across Europe capped the whole. The main goal of the conferences was to understand better the evolution of the *querelle*’s French and European-wide impact, its political and ideological changes over several centuries, and its influence on society today. Four volumes of the proceedings have been published since 2012, each containing excerpts of *querelle* texts, both printed and in manuscript, from France, Spain, England, and Italy. One can also find on the website a listing of *querelle* texts from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries; currently, however, only the texts from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century are posted. This catalogue proves extremely useful in that it references European-wide works on the nature and status of

The screenshot shows the SIEFAR website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: PAGE, DISCUSSION, LIRE, CHANGEMENTS EN ATTENTE, VOIR LE TEXTE SOURCE, and HISTORIQUE. The main header reads 'SIEFAR' and 'Accueil'. On the left, there is a 'NAVIGATION' menu with links like 'Accueil', 'Personnages', 'Avi de recherche', etc., and a 'RECHERCHER' section with a search box. The main content area is titled 'Dictionnaire des Femmes de l'ancienne France' and contains several paragraphs of text, a list of 'OUTILS', and 'AUTRES LANGUES'. The footer includes a Creative Commons license notice and a 'Presented by MedioWis' logo.

Figure 1. Access page to the *Dictionnaire* of *ancien régime* women. Screen shot 1 September 2016.

women and on the so-called battle of the sexes, along with catalogs of famous women, bio-bibliographies and anthologies, translations of French *querelle* texts into several languages, as well as titles of *querelle* texts from other countries.

In its bid to challenge potential and actual gender stereotyping and misogyny in French political and university discourses, SIEFAR includes on its site the recent polemic over Mme de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves*, arguably France's most famous female-authored novel and a nationally prized work. On several occasions, President Nicolas Sarkozy derided the inclusion of the novel in general examinations on culture for governmental administrators and employees: "I suffered a lot on her account," he admitted in a speech on July 24, 2008 (as recorded on SIEFAR's website). SIEFAR's rubric "Touche pas à ma princesse!" (Don't touch my princess!) — a take on the anti-racist slogan "Touche pas à mon pote" (Don't touch my buddy) — posts the many interesting articles for and against Sarkozy's statements. Similarly, in "Louise attaquée! Louise Labé est-elle une créature de

papier?" (Louise attacked! Is Louise Labé a paper creature? [that is, a fiction]), SIEFAR addresses the controversy in university circles, mainstream newspapers, and blogs unleashed by Mireille Huchon's book, *Louise Labé, une créature de papier* (2006). For those teaching Lafayette and Labé, these entries will certainly stimulate vigorous classroom discussions of past and present gender stereotypes.

SIEFAR's contributing members receive the added benefits of a monthly email notice listing the most recent international publications in the field, as well as calls for papers, conferences, and exhibits. Members may also post detailed descriptions of their recently published monographs. These items remain on the website for one year, after which they are automatically appended to the author's entry in the international repertory of scholars.

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The Women Writers Project
<http://www.wwp.northeastern.edu>

One of the advantages that digital humanities offers scholars is the possibility of developing new computational and publication methods in order to reshape the ways in which we analyze and disseminate the works of authors that have been excluded from more traditional modes of scholarship. Certainly, those of us on the textual side of DH have long argued that digital forms of publication provide important opportunities to expand the literary canon and reconsider cultural, historical, and genre studies in ways that market-driven print publication has disallowed. Digitization permits us to question and rethink what constitutes an edition, a collection, or an anthology, and thus to participate in the shaping of new ways in which we engage with texts and reconsider their reception.

Different from large-scale digitization projects such as Early English Books Online (EEBO), the text-centric DH projects to which I refer, such as the Perseus Digital Library,¹ the Orlando Project,² and the Text Creation Partnership,³ are distinguished by their emphasis on otherwise unfeasible editorial approaches that consider translation, reclamation of literary voices, more comprehensive oeuvres,

¹ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>

² <http://www.artsrn.ualberta.ca/orlando/>

³ <http://www.textcreationpartnership.org/>