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Tencin, Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de. *Memoirs of the Count of Comminge and The Misfortunes of Love*. Ed. and trans. Jonathan Walsh. Foreword by Michel Delon

Kendall Tarte

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**Tencin, Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de.**

***Memoirs of the Count of Comminge and The Misfortunes of Love.* Ed. and trans. Jonathan Walsh. Foreword by Michel Delon.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 48 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 499. Toronto: Iter Academic Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016. pp. xiii, 147. ISBN 978-0-86698-554-3 (paperback) US\$31.95.

Famous in her lifetime as a popular *salonnière* whose guests included Marivaux, Montesquieu, and Fontenelle, among many others, Claudine-Alexandrine Guérin de Tencin published her first work of sentimental fiction in 1735 at the age of fifty-three. With this volume in the excellent Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series, Jonathan Walsh presents fresh English translations of two of Tencin's three completed novels. Published anonymously as was common in the period, these works belong to the tradition of the feminine historical novel that originated in 1678 with Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*. Tencin's novels feature winding narratives with often improbable turns, tales of false identity and betrayal, cross-dressing women and deathbed confessions. Whereas Tencin, like other women novelists of the period, relied on the traditional, uncontroversial genre of the historical novel, these works remain compelling to today's reader.

A brief foreword by Michel Delon, editor of the recent French edition of the *Mémoires du comte de Comminge*, discusses the challenge of translating Tencin's crisp language, especially those abstract terms in the singular that become literal when used in the plural. Delon's text is framed by somewhat peculiar remarks contrasting the use of language in our contemporary society to that of Tencin's era, and linking her two novels to the very different works of Jane Austen more than half a century later. Walsh's useful introduction, however, puts Tencin's novels squarely in the context of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novel. He draws out comparisons with works by Tencin's contemporaries, including Samuel Richardson, Françoise de Graffigny, and Abbé Prevost, especially the latter's *Cleveland*. Tencin's sentimental novels aim to appeal to the reader by foregrounding their heroines' virtue and emotional anguish. Walsh explores the themes of isolation and real and metaphorical imprisonment, and the novels' gloomy landscapes that anticipate those of the Gothic novel. This introduction also gives the outline of Tencin's biography—her

early years in a convent, her dedication to her brother's career, her liaisons with influential men, and the intellectual pursuits that culminated in the salon she hosted and, late in life, in her published novels.

The 1735 *Memoirs of the Count of Comminge* belongs to the popular genre of the memoir-novel. It opens with a framing device typical of the period and the genre: a prefatory statement that this text was among those found in the papers of a dead man, ostensibly the fictional first-person narrator himself. This novel is brief—just over thirty pages in this format—and captivating. The narrator recounts the bitter rivalry between his father and his father's cousin, his own encounter with the cousin's daughter Adélaïde and their immediate and intense love for one another, and his father's opposition to their union. In a novel marked by a series of improbable plot twists and misunderstandings, the two never unite. The extraordinary culminating scene reveals that Adélaïde, now on the verge of death, had disguised herself as a monk to live undetected close to Comminge in the abbey where he had retreated when he thought her dead.

Walsh's translation of *The Misfortunes of Love* (1747) is the first to appear in English. More than twice as long as the *Memoirs*, this novel features a series of three embedded stories, each narrated by a different woman: the wealthy Pauline; her confidante, the nun Eugénie; and Hippolyte, the daughter of the man who jailed Pauline's beloved Barbasan. In both Pauline's and Eugénie's tales, a misunderstanding about the beloved's devotion leads the woman to an unhappy union with another man. Hippolyte confesses that she dressed as a man to trick Barbasan, leading to another ill-fated union, since he continues to love Pauline. By way of the frame narrative, Pauline hears both Eugénie's and Hippolyte's stories; this interlocking device heightens the emotional pull of the suffering and virtue of these heroines.

This volume is ideally suited for use in the classroom. The scholarly apparatus is unobtrusive: occasional footnotes elucidate a cultural reference or explain the meaning of a translated word (though not the thorny translation questions that Delon, in the foreword, and Walsh, in the translator's note, highlight). The helpful bibliography includes principal French editions and English translations of Tencin's novels (both *Mémoires du Comte de Comminge* and *Les Malheurs de l'amour* have been published in the past two decades by Éditions Desjonquères) along with biographies and secondary sources in English, French, and Italian. Most importantly, in Walsh's highly readable

translation, these texts engage the reader in their gripping tales of suffering in love.

KENDALL TARTE

Wake Forest University

**Thomas, Troy.**

***Caravaggio and the Creation of Modernity.***

London: Reaktion Books, 2016. Pp. 272 + 67 colour ill. ISBN 978-1-78023-676-6 (hardcover) US\$22.

This richly illustrated volume, organized both chronologically and thematically, is a comprehensive examination of the life and career of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In particular, Troy Thomas's treatment of Caravaggio's mature Roman period (1599–1606) offers a detailed investigation of the compositional innovation of Caravaggio's work that has distinguished his unique style and established his reputation as a master of modernity.

Thomas's book identifies a major compositional innovation of Caravaggio's work: uncompromising realism. Although a formulaic pattern of representation was often used in pre-modern religious painting, Caravaggio deliberately avoided traditional religious visual rhetoric. In approaching art from an unconventional angle, Caravaggio could reimagine almost any religious narrative as a genre scene. This novel approach to subject matter is best illustrated in his *Penitent Magdalene* (ca. 1595–96). In the sixteenth-century, Mary Magdalene was customarily painted nude and with a religious accessory. Yet Caravaggio, departing from traditional Magdalene iconography, painted the Christian figure as an ordinary and modest woman in contemporary dress. Sitting before an ointment jar and jewellery, she is the visual realization of a scene from a religious text recast as a living drama.

Caravaggio's keen sense of realism is further evidenced in his *Calling of St. Matthew* (1599–1600). Here again, we see how a religious drama is imaginatively reinterpreted as a contemporary event. Since the conceptualization of a sacred event from an earthly and realistic view was widely recognized as new at the time, Thomas has argued that Caravaggio was successful in introducing modernity and sophistication to his work while simultaneously transforming