

## Mamoon on Bourguinat (2017)

Bourguinat, Nicolas. *“Et in Arcadia ego...”: voyages et séjours de femmes en Italie, 1770–1870*. Bourg, 2017, pp. 441, ISBN 978-2-9561229-0-6

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Bourguinat’s erudite work follows the footsteps of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European women travelers to Italy. The topic is exciting and the impressive research covers several as-yet uncharted territories in the exploration of women’s travel to Italy. Nonetheless, a lengthy introduction delays immediate engagement by meticulously detailing the history of well-known male wanderers. Canonical men’s travel accounts also punctuate the rest of the study, but primarily to furnish a literary context for women’s travel writing.

The first part of the book, entitled “Les Femmes, le voyage d’Italie et l’écriture,” consists of four chapters. “Les Approches de l’Italie: contacts, transferts, échanges” discusses artistic pursuits and artists’ retreats. This opening chapter also features exiles and expatriates as well as translations and literary circulation. The next section juxtaposes trips borne out of necessity or with liberating journeys; it sheds light on the banalization of sojourns undertaken by single women. In the third chapter, the author focuses on the writing practices of female travelers and the relationship of more intimate genres such as journals, diaries, and letters to activities undertaken in the public arena. In addition, he examines the different causes for women writers’ hesitations about publicizing their work, and the transfer of material from one genre to another. Bourguinat explains that the female author’s desire for anonymity can range from “une simple exigence de discrétion” to “un jeu” or even arise out of plain “convention” (171–72). The last chapter of this section, called “Mobilités et écritures féminines de l’Italie: plusieurs voies nationales,” features women travelers from different countries and linguistic backgrounds. English-speaking adventurers figure alongside French, German, Russian, and Polish wayfarers and include such talented personalities as Angelica Kauffmann, Élisabeth Vigée Lebrun, Louise Colet, and George Sand. The fourth chapter also provides instructive graphs and charts comparing travel statistics and publication data regarding female travelers and travel narratives from different parts of Europe. Furthermore, it describes the nature of readership of women’s travel writing from the period. Commenting on the positive reception of female travel accounts from their inception, Bourguinat remarks that “les tout premiers textes signés par des femmes avaient été accueillis avec une certaine réserve mais jamais par un refus en bloc” (212).

Appearing under the heading “Les Discours du voyage féminin en Italie,” the second half of the study contains four chapters. “La Femme voyageant et écrivain: une rhétorique de l’infériorité” underscores the elements of self-deprecation and dissimulation embedded in feminine discourses that often seem to diminish the merits of their own travel narratives. In this section, Bourguinat argues that by emphasizing qualities like “naturel” and “spontanéité” in their journals and diaries, female travelers to Italy tried to render their accounts more amateurish, and present them as products of dilettantism rather than fruits of toil (225). Chapter six centers around complex questions of nation building and constructions of alterity. Bourguinat suggests that Italy offered a terrain where different European nationals, for example the French and the English, crossed paths and sometimes made prejudicial assumptions about the other (243). He colorfully illustrates the “malentendu” by contrasting English traveler Jane Waldie Watts’s lofty summation of her compatriots’ reasons for visiting foreign climes—“pour acquérir des connaissances, élargir ses vues, perfectionner ses réflexions”—to French chronicler Louis de Fontanes’s dark observation that the English only came to Italy “pour la dépouiller” (243). Nevertheless, according to Bourguinat, the unsuitability of Italy for foreign women represented a commonly held view circulated by female writers across both cultures claiming an “abondance de preuves que la dignité et la réputation de la femme étrangère étaient sous la menace dès que celle-ci se trouvait plongée dans un environnement italien” (251). The chapter entitled “L’Italie entre soumission et régénération” adopts a more political lens as it delves into commentaries about encounters with foreign occupation and military presence in Italy and as it examines testimonials of social conditions and poverty. “Le Génie des lieux” describes the particular fascination attributed to specific cities such as Naples, Rome, and Venice, and enumerates their major tourist attractions and sites of veneration.

In his conclusion, Bourguinat hesitates to extend credit for lending “une voix entièrement originale” to the women travelers who wrote about Italy and publicized their narratives (406). Instead, the author claims, to a large extent, “les voyageuses publiantes” from the era under study contributed to the birth of “l’écriture objectivante et encyclopédique des Lumières,” and created “cette tradition d’écriture de la mobilité et du dépaysement” so prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century, which moved away from the “classic” approaches favored by the Peninsula, namely those in tune with evolving social rules and mores (406). Bourguinat’s perspicacious inquiry into women’s travel accounts from the 1770s to the 1870s makes a significant contribution to women’s studies, and enriches nineteenth-century European scholarship by drawing attention to the largely neglected field of women-authored travel texts.

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