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**The Ideas of Man and Woman in Renaissance
France: Print, Rhetoric, and Law by Lyndan
Warner**

Julie Campbell, *Eastern Illinois University*



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Lyndan Warner. *The Ideas of Man and Woman in Renaissance France: Print, Rhetoric, and Law.*

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To consider connections between the *querelle des femmes* and the debate over the dignity and misery of man in sixteenth-century France, Warner examines texts in the debates, printers who published them, and libraries in which they appeared. She also looks at court cases that echoed debate commonplaces. Noting that works on the dignity and misery of man were as common as those on the *querelle*, she argues that the two groups of texts should be read together, for if “we ignore early modern lamentations of the weakness of man, we might make the mistake of

misinterpreting *querelle des femmes* writing about the weakness of woman as pure misogyny" (7). Noting, as many have, that one should not dismiss Renaissance writing patterns in the *querelle* as "just rhetoric" or "just a literary game" (20), Warner points out that ideas in the texts she examines "had roots in the social realities of sixteenth-century France, in particular the concerns with rank and marriage" (51). She attributes rising tensions in these areas to expansion of office-holding opportunities under François I and Henri II.

Emphasizing that wives are frequently a *querelle* topic, she writes, "Several generations of merchants could purchase their way into the nobility of the robe," thus making a "strategic marriage . . . as important at the level of the artisan . . . as it was to the *bourgeois* who hoped to enter the service of king and state with a venal or purchased office" (52). The dignity-of-man debate became entwined with the *querelle* because for "those not born near the top of the hierarchy, the dignity of noble status conferred to a husband or son by a purchased or venal office was then maintained or improved by family efforts or through marriage alliances," causing the marriage alliance to be "crucial to chances for success and advancement," especially after opportunities for purchasing offices declined in the latter half of the century (53–54). This combination of opportunity for advancement and resulting pressure for advantageous marriages, Warner argues, was key to the rise of intertextuality between the debates.

Warner examines such dignity-of-man texts as Isabella Sforza's "On the Excellence and Dignity of Man" in *De la vraye tranquillité de l'esprit* (1546), Symphorien Champier's *La Nef des princes* (1502), Pierre Boaistuau's *Brief Discourse on the Excellence and Dignity of Man* (1558), and Madeleine de l'Aubespine's *Des saines affections* (1593) in tandem with such *querelle* texts as Martin Le Franc's *Champion des dames* (1440s–1530), Pierre de Lesnauderie's *Praise of Marriage* (1523), and Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's *On the Nobility and Pre-Excellence of the Feminine Sex* (trans. ca. 1530). She also discusses works by Erasmus, Montaigne, Pero Mexia, and Jean de Marconville. Regarding printers, she considers the L'Angelier brothers, Jean Janot and his widow Jeanne de Marnef, and Jean de Tournes, examining their "packaging and selling" of the debates (37). Warner also identifies debate texts in the library of Gilbert Hodic, a notary at the Châtelet de Paris, and his wife Geneviève Bureau, and comments on other collections. Moreover, she explores two legal cases, one that "follows a noblewoman through four stages of life as a daughter, wife, widow and remarried woman," and another that "involves a nobleman in his various roles as master of a household . . . companion or lover . . . father, husband, and brother" (187). In each, she points out the *querelle* and dignity-of-man rhetoric permeating the lawyers' pleadings.

This is a valuable study on a particular microcosm of the *querelle* and debate on the dignity of man. Warner's reading of *querelle* literature underscores the importance of continued study of this debate and how it was adapted to fit given historical moments. An interesting consideration, though, is that while these debates regarding marriage and the legal contexts they influenced indeed reflect the sixteenth-century exigencies Warner explicates, they also illustrate continuity with

earlier *querelle* issues and contexts that receive little acknowledgment here: the medieval debate about clerical celibacy that gave rise to much *querelle* rhetoric on marriage that is adapted in texts she considers, and the scholastic training that taught lawyers to think in what Warner calls “the sixteenth-century mental habit of exploring both sides of an argument” (2), as well as to use the classical allusions and *querelle* and nature-of-man commonplaces she highlights in court cases (188). Such further contextualization of the sixteenth-century debates would provide an especially enlightening look at how the *querelle* evolved in response to dominant concerns in this ensuing period. In any case, Warner’s work provides a useful and insightful model for study of ways that popular debates permeate diverse areas of culture and society.

JULIE D. CAMPBELL
Eastern Illinois University