

Cleveland State University  
**EngagedScholarship@CSU**



World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Faculty  
Publications

Department of World Languages, Literatures, and  
Cultures

Winter 1993

# Review of Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French

Tama L. Engelking

Cleveland State University, [t.engelking@csuohio.edu](mailto:t.engelking@csuohio.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clmlang\\_facpub](https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clmlang_facpub)

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

**How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!**

*Publisher's Statement*

(c)1993 Taylor & Francis

---

## Recommended Citation

Tama L. Engelking. "Review of Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French" *Romance Quarterly*, 40.1 (Winter 1993): 60-61.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact [library.es@csuohio.edu](mailto:library.es@csuohio.edu).

The main focus of *Displacements* is women writers and canon formation, but the editors of this important collection of essays are careful to avoid a purely academic treatment of this vital issue. Instead, Miller and DeJean have gathered essays from some of the top feminist critics in this country into a volume of practical criticism that will hit readers where it matters most--in the American university classroom. As DeJean points out in the preface, those who teach French in America must work to create new options "or we will be forced to live with those created by and for teachers of French in France" (p. ix). She identifies the widening distance separating our version of the French literary canon (what we teach) from the official French version (what is available) as "continental drift," and argues that the effects are most visible in the area of feminist criticism.

The essays included in the third and final section of the collection, "Canons and other Voices: Relocating French Literature" make this point most forcibly. It is here that the present volume, with its emphasis on "Literatures in French," differs most from the special issue of *Yale French Studies*, "The Politics of Tradition: Placing Women in French Literature" 75 (1988), also edited by Miller and DeJean, in which nine of the fifteen essays first appeared. The three essays added to this section deal with Marie Chauvet (from Haiti), North African writers Marie Cardinal and MarieTherese Humbert, and interviews with six Quebecois women writers. The editors take a practical step toward making a larger place in the canon for women writing outside of France by making a larger place for them in their collection. Part 3 also includes excerpted interviews with 14 French women writers, all of whom resist the notion of "a canon," which they identify as an American academic concern--more evidence of the continental drift separating us.

Before we reach the point of relocating the canon in the directions suggested in the final section, the first two sections of *Displacements* take us through the history of canon formation, touching on some of the factors that have determined who is in and who is out. Among the contributors to part 1, "Making Canons in France," are Naomi Schor and Nancy K. Miller. This section concludes with an insightful statistical analysis of the authors included on the French Agregation Examination.

The highlights from part 2, "Canons and Contexts: Production, Reception, Revision" include Quilligan's essay on the strategies Christine de Pizan used to insert her voice into the canon, Barbara Johnson's essay on Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and Elaine Marks's examination of "Imaginary Renee Vivien's," both of which illustrate how women poets have been read to suit the various ideological agendas of their readers.

The quality of the critical writing in *Displacements* alone makes it worth taking the time to read, but it has the additional advantage of being wellrounded and deep enough to do justice to the

complex array of factors affecting the place of woman writers in the French literary canon. The biggest strength of *Displacements*, however, is that it suggests possibilities for the canon transformations that we, as scholars and teachers of French, are inevitably engaged in whenever we analyze or teach works by women and Francophone writers.