

way toward making early modern grammar texts, considered dry and boring even at the time of their printing, *interesting*.

Joan DeJean. *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xii + 204 pp. + 10 illus. \$45.00 cloth; \$18.00 paper. Review by MELISSA MOHR, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

DeJean's book is more ambitious than its title suggests. She traces the history of obscenity from ancient Rome to late seventeenth-century France, touching along the way on attitudes towards four-letter words and other kinds of indecency in the middle ages across Europe, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy and England, and in the present-day United States. The book, not surprisingly, given DeJean's areas of expertise, is most successful when it deals with France, as three of its five chapters do.

In these chapters, DeJean argues that obscenity was reinvented in France between 1550 and 1663, and that it spread in its new form to England and Italy. This reinvention occurred when obscene literature, previously the province of elite male readers (and previously not identified as "obscene" *per se*), began to circulate in an uncontrolled fashion among a broader population of bourgeois readers, both male and female. As its readership expanded, the obscene changed in character. It became strongly identified with what we today would call four-letter words and began to focus almost exclusively on female genitalia. DeJean contends that the latter change signals the cultural imposition of heterosexuality on male desires—and on the literature that represents them—which were formerly "polyvalent, desiring all that was desirable" (55). The key cause and sign of obscenity's reinvention, however, was that obscene texts became subject to systematic secular censorship. These contested texts in turn played important roles in the development of mass-market print culture and of "modern censorial machinery" (4). The modern concept of "the author" thus originates in obscene discourse, since, as DeJean argues, following Foucault, books

only began to have ‘authors’ when someone needed to be punished for contents considered to be transgressive.

DeJean’s first case study is that of Théophile de Viau, who was prosecuted for a “sodomite sonnet” (29) that appeared in a 1622 collection of satiric verse, *Le Parnasse des poètes satiriques*. His trial was conducted by civil authorities—DeJean gives a brief account of the battles between secular and religious censors over the burgeoning book trade and cases like Théophile’s. Though the charges against Théophile were of “impiety and blasphemy” (43), DeJean argues that “what the magistrates were actually trying to prove, rather than the charges they claimed to be prosecuting” (51) involved two secular crimes—drunkenness and sodomy. Théophile’s libertine poem circulated publicly at alehouses, and “speech crimes uttered in such promiscuous surroundings had the potential to corrupt an unpredictably diverse audience” (45). This potential for contamination beyond restricted circles of elite male readers made the poem’s last line—“Je fais vœux désormais de ne . . . tre qu’en cul” [“I swear from now on to . . . ck only in the ass”] (41)—even more dangerous. DeJean implies that even a few years previously, this line would have occasioned little comment and certainly no censorship. But in 1622 Théophile was caught on the wrong side of “a demarcation never before operative in sexually transgressive literature: between desire for women and desire for men” (46). The category of the decent had changed, leaving poets who followed classical models vulnerable to prosecution.

DeJean next addresses the attempted suppression of *L’Ecole des filles* (1655), “the obscene’s first modern classic” (154). This work was immensely popular, bringing obscene literature to a whole new group of readers—the bourgeoisie, male and female—because of its “format, genre, and language and, . . . radically new content” (61). It was published in inexpensive editions; it was a novel, with characters that came straight out of the Parisian bourgeoisie; and it was written in the vernacular. Above all, it promoted a new version of sexuality, in which women’s genitalia were talked about, “moreover, *celebrated* in a fashion previously reserved for male organs. . . . [F]emale genitalia, for the first time in any erotic or

transgressive literature, are portrayed not as disgusting but as a source of pleasure for both partners" (72). *L'Ecole* thus "inaugurates modern pornography" (74), for along with its emphasis on female genitals came the concealment of male genitalia and a resolute denial that desire can be anything but heterosexual. The novel's printing history also shows secular censorship becoming more and more systematized—the print run of the 1655 edition was entirely destroyed.

As France's "first truly modern author" (84), Molière draws the biggest share of DeJean's attention. She examines the controversy surrounding his *L'Ecole des femmes*, first performed in late 1662. Though she has insisted throughout the book that official, secular censorship is a necessary feature of "modern obscenity," *L'Ecole* attracted no civil prosecution—she never makes clear how this play fits into her definition, or perhaps changes it. The play instead inspired a flood of public criticism objecting to its scandalous "scene of the *thé* (*la scène du 'le'*)" (102). In *La Critique de "L'Ecole des femmes"* (1663), Molière gives a name to what fuels his public's ire—it is "*obscénité*" (103)—and thus, "after 150 years during which it was usually only partly understood even by the few who used it, [he] finally brought the vocabulary of the obscene fully into public existence" (104). *L'Ecole* and the controversy it provoked also gave rise to the phenomenon of author as celebrity, and with it, tabloid journalism. Molière was the first French author "able to sell widely on the basis of his name" (120), and as a result, his private life became public. 'Newsmen' such as Jean Donneau de Visé suddenly felt free to print that his young wife Armande Béjart was cuckolding the playwright, or that she was really his daughter. "Molière's censors," DeJean argues, "must somehow have felt that his traffic in the obscene had authorized them to extend the specter of sexual indecency into his private life" (118).

The first chapter, with its sections on ancient Rome, the middle ages, Italy, and England, is less successful—it suffers from oversimplification and occasional factual inaccuracies. DeJean repeatedly emphasizes, for example, "the obscene's far less troubled life in antiquity" (7) than in early modern France, which she sets out to

show in an unconvincing page of discussion spanning hundreds of years of Greco-Roman history. And she claims that, after the term's long hibernation during the middle ages, "English speakers only began to use *obscene* once the usage had been reinvented in French. What appears to be the first appearance of *obscene* in its modern context occurs in the charges against those who had printed and sold the 1688 English translation" (134) of *L'Ecole des filles*. She thus ignores, among others, instances of "obscene" in the works of John Marston (1598), Ben Jonson (1640), Joseph Hall (1656), and Robert Fletcher (1656), as well as examples of "obscenely" in Shakespeare (1588) and Milton (1642), and other variants such as "obscenousnesse," in John Harington's preface to his *Orlando Furioso* (1591). Such cases certainly suggest that the "obscene"—as a concept and as a word—was alive and well in England before 1688. These faults stem partly from her attempt to address the European history of obscenity from ancient Rome through the late seventeenth century in the book's first twenty-seven pages. *The Reinvention of Obscenity* would benefit either from vastly expanded coverage of these areas or from their excision, leaving its author to concentrate on early modern France where her true interest seems to lie.

The biggest problem with the book is DeJean's unwillingness to address blasphemy, charges of which feature in two of her three main examples. As she acknowledges, Théophile's sonnet was actually accused not of obscenity or indecency, but of "impiety and blasphemy" (43). And *L'Ecole des filles* was condemned, as she again acknowledges, for being "against the honor of God and of the Church" (100), "impious" (116), and "contrary to Christian discipline" (116)" (63). Rather than exploring what seems to be a strong and interesting connection between the blasphemous and the obscene in these two cases, she simply decides that "When the obscene was finally reinvented, it caught the censors up short, and no one knew what to call it" (63). She does occasionally note that French censorship displays much "confusion between religious and secular issues" (31), but her own evidence implies that censors do not *confuse* blasphemy and obscenity, but rather that the two concepts are integrally related. They are two kinds of powerful trans-

gressive language, one in a slow decline, one in the ascendant as what she and Norbert Elias call “the civilizing process” (19) exerts increasing control over European minds and mores.

Despite its drawbacks, *The Reinvention of Obscenity* has much for readers interested in early modern French print culture. For more in-depth histories of obscenity, especially in Italy and England, pick up instead *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, edited by Lynn Hunt, or Ian Moulton’s *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*.

Roger D. Sell. *Literature as Communication: The Foundations of Mediating Criticism*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000. xiv + 348 pp. \$95.00. *Mediating Criticism: Literary Education Humanized*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001. x + 431pp. \$85.00. Review by ALAN RUDRUM, SIMONFRASER UNIVERSITY.

I began to read *Literature as Communication* a short while before September 11, 2001. The events of that day drove me to Robert Fisk’s *Pity the Nation* and related books by Jonathan Randal, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Said. In my institution, a prolonged and rancorous e-mail war broke out, in which any attempt to contextualize 9/11 was treated as anti-American and anti-semitic, as was any suggestion that the incursion into Afghanistan would be no more effective in combating terrorism than the 1982 invasion of Lebanon had been in finishing off the PLO.

The point of this recollection is the relevance of Sell’s project to consideration of “the clash of cultures.” *Literature as Communication* is prefaced by quotations from Stuart Hampshire, Isaiah Berlin, and K. Anthony Appiah, all of which formulate the need for empathy. Hampshire recalls the vision of Heraclitus, that “life, and liveliness within the soul and within society, consists in perpetual conflicts between rival impulses and ideals, and that justice pre-sides over the hostilities and finds sufficient compromises to pre-