denied her because he had company. At least it was not the ultimate denial his grandfather, Paolo Giordano Orsini I offered his wife Isabella Medici, patroness of another musica and the first published woman composer, Madalena Casulana. Isabella was murdered by Paolo, who cut her throat, for many reasons, not the least of which was that she wanted to sing. Ah, the quirky threads of history, for I would like to imagine that Madalena and Francesca roam a sky replete with their voices, out in the world—a romanesca indeed, a musical way of being, for all to hear.

This is a splendid book, which I find full of hope, well worth the read, whether or not one looks for a “new way” of writing about women’s music. Saluti!

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In the first decades of the eighteenth century, a young and beautiful actress performing in the French provinces won the heart, or at least the jealous attention, of a male playgoer. He would not be the last man to desire Mlle. Clairon. Skilled in her craft, after her début at the Comédie-Française in 1743, she became a “great tragic diva of mid-century” (248). On the one hand, Clairon’s rise to fame points to the social opportunities, financial profit, and relative legal autonomy that life as an actress afforded some of France’s women by the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the rumors, lies, and misconceptions that swirled around her demonstrate that success on the stage also mired actresses in stereotypes that threatened to erase the memory of their artistic contributions. The Paris morals police accused her of “an absurd number of lovers” (35), and one man, in Rouen, who became obsessed with Clairon, penned a malicious libelle that dogged her the rest of her days. In her Mémoires, Clairon wrote that when the libelle “appeared,” her “pain was beyond all expression” (37).

Scott states a two-part goal: first, “to provide detailed and relatively credible information about the personal and professional lives of the
women who performed tragedy and comedy (and sometimes farce) in France and in Paris for some two hundred years”; and second, “to challenge the constantly iterated and reiterated stereotype [of the actress], or at least to temper one set of images with another” (286). Scott’s careful handling of the documents pertaining to Clairon’s life and work reveal the degree to which Scott has accomplished her objectives. The reader who hopes for juicy tidbits from the libelle against Clairon or from the morals police file, for example, will be disappointed. When Scott does cite from rumor-prone sources, she tests their content against other documents. The result is an account of early modern actresses that unearths their stories without perpetuating the hearsay that runs through so much of the historical record.

The book begins with a methodological reflection on anecdotes, since they permeate even the most official sources available to the theater historian. Scott proposes, more by showing than by telling, that the historian should prioritize legal and administrative documents such as wills, inventories, contracts, and parish registers, using them to “unpack” anecdotal evidence (30). She abides by this method in the subsequent chapters, organized chronologically. After a brief discussion of the way antitheatrical sentiment might have shaped early modern French attitudes toward actresses, Scott surveys what is known about women performing before 1630. The paucity of surviving documents makes generalizations risky, but Scott shows that the women about whom we do know something were not yet shareholders in their troupes, often married into the profession, probably participated in all genres except the sottie (satirical plays performed by young men), and may have been especially valued in genres “filled with Jezebels,” such as farce (66). Their presence in farce may have contributed to stereotypes about actresses as sexually available and of low birth, while a small handful of verifiable marital struggles might have fueled the idea that actresses were “wives in common,” shared by all the men in a troupe (99).

These stereotypes persisted into the 1630s and 1640s, although actresses’ situations improved as the commercial theater in Paris — Scott’s focus for the rest of the book — took root. Actresses became shareholding members of their troupes, enabling them to live a bourgeois lifestyle, and playwrights, including the young Corneille, began writing roles tailor-made for specific actresses. Scott undertakes an ingenious close reading
of the comedies composed by Corneille between 1629 and 1634 in order to speculate about the particular performance capabilities of the actresses at the Marais Theater that he would have had in mind: Isabelle Mestivier, known as Mademoiselle Le Noir, and Marguerite Béguin, known as Mademoiselle Villiers. Whereas France’s earliest actresses battled farcical stereotypes, Scott shows convincingly that, once women began to achieve stardom in the middle of the seventeenth century, gossip mongers often confused actresses with their roles. At the same time, enhanced by new levels of fame and wealth, actresses enjoyed more prestige that began to inspire envy among the elite.

Scott posits that in the eighteenth century, some leading actresses did indeed forge social and romantic ties with people in high places, providing fresh fodder for an old stereotype that actresses with money were necessarily “kept” women. Meanwhile, Scott observes that actresses in many ways grew more vulnerable than they had been in the previous century. They entered the profession younger and were more on their own. Since theater had ceased to be a family business, a system of emplois or character categories regulated the roles they played and fit actresses into a strict hierarchy. At the same time, the French monarchy increasingly interfered with the Comédie-Française’s affairs, and so the agency of actresses concerning casting, repertory, and finances declined. As Scott shows in her concluding chapter, although stereotypes about actresses had some “relationship to reality” (286), the “afterlives” of France’s early modern actresses in biographies, plays, and films do them an injustice by trapping actresses perpetually “in the land of the anecdote” (283).

Scott makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the evolution of women’s involvement with the stage in early modern France. The book’s principle weakness, which does not compromise its success, concerns structure at the chapter level. Scott rarely states her central claims up front. Her explicitly stated claims in many cases do not quite correspond to the argument she actually builds, and she tends either to omit transitions between subtopics or announce them so early that they are not effective. This makes the reader’s task a little more challenging, despite Scott’s enjoyable prose. Nor does Scott probe the stereotypes that plagued actresses as deeply as she could. For example, did the stereotypes
Scott identifies merely magnify early modern French ideas about women, or did the actress occupy some other category of thought? Did male actors suffer any of the same stereotypes? Were actresses “public” or “common” in a way that men on stage were not? The rather unsatisfying chapter on actresses and anitheatricalism, which does not examine any French discourses against the theater, could have provided a forum for such questions. Admittedly, Scott’s aim was to challenge, not deconstruct, stereotypes, a goal she achieves. Her approach both expands our knowledge of women in the theater and provides insight into casting practices, actor training, and acting processes in early modernity.

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Christine’s often celebrated “humanism” makes this collection of her literary contributions to the late medieval debate over the _Roman de la rose_ a fitting addition to the Other Voice Series in Early Modern Europe. The series’ editors’ introduction by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., appended to all volumes in the series, already champions Christine as a literary forerunner and figurative pioneer of female authority; the present volume suggests the value of more sustained inquiry into her Renaissance legacy. Although Hult admits in his introduction that the documents of the debate largely fade from view during the early modern period, he nonetheless offers the selected translations in order to interrogate their significance both in the Middle Ages and beyond. He asks, in what sense is Christine a pioneer? Hult’s answer is offered up front: Christine is by no means the first woman writer, but she is perhaps the first to represent her voice as that of a woman in a literary sphere of men.

Hult’s edition collates, translates into modern English prose, and contextualizes the various letters, treatises, and verses of the debate on the