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Abstract

Marie Leprince de Beaumont, a novelist, journalist and pedagogue, was one of the most well-known 18th-century writers in France and Europe. The large number of translations of her work up until the end of the 19th century, particularly of her “Magasins,” attests to the extent of her contribution to the circulation of ideas. However, the name of Marie Leprince de Beaumont [circa 1711-1780], a prolific writer in her time, has largely been forgotten. At times, people still associate her with the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast,” but even here the connection is rarely made. During her lifetime this author and educator was known for a much wider body of work, especially for her educational writings. These were aimed at people of different ages and professions and thus constituted a very novel type of writing. The numerous editions of these texts and their dissemination in France and throughout Europe testify to their popularity and the author’s high profile. Yet, the image of the author oscillated between that “bigot catholic” and “pious and industrious lady,” depending on her reader’s sociocultural background and character. Voltaire for example noted sharply: “There is a Madame de Beaumont-Leprince who makes some kind of catechism for young ladies,” meanwhile Johann Wolfgang von Goethe recommended her works to his younger sister Cornelia. Whereas the Spanish Inquisition banned some of her work for being too progressive, they were generally well-received in German-speaking countries, even though their translations had to be partially adapted for Protestant or Catholic audiences. Despite these adversarial reviews, there is a lot of evidence of her proactive and innovative stance, especially with regard to the equality of women for knowledge acquisition. This thesis analyses these contradictory images and the reception of Marie Leprince de Beaumont in German-speaking countries to show her pedagogical influence and the educational use of her oeuvre. It also discusses the reasons for her oblivion in 19th century as well as the adaptation strategies of publishers to keep her works alive. This research therefore shows that this French author has deserves her place in the literary pantheon.