



Mineral Waters as a Treatment for Barrenness in the Eighteenth Century

Sophie Vasset, Université Paris-Diderot (France)

sophie.vasset@univ-paris-diderot.fr

Abstract:

The development of spa towns and mineral waters in the eighteenth century has long been studied as one of the examples of the development of leisure, luxury and consumer culture. Waters have mostly been represented for their worldly sociability, as places of travel and leisure. In addition, the proliferation of medical treatments on mineral waters has been explained as a means of commercial promotion for newly refurbished baths sites. It would be reductive to consider thermal medicine solely as the medicine of a privileged class as represented in Smollett's or Jane Austen's novels. The waters also benefited from a more local frequentation, more diverse and perhaps driven by their eager search for efficient treatment. What's more, among the upper class visitors, many patients experienced serious medical conditions, and in the case of infertility, were convinced that the effect of the spa was medically proved, and sometimes even successful. In this article, I propose to take an interest in the treatment of infertility by mineral waters in order to examine, on the basis of this specific object, the social diversity of water users, as well as the diversity of medical theories that justify the internal and external prescription of water for women who were considered infertile. This is part of a larger work on spas as the treatment for barrenness which will be the subject of my next book, and I would like to share the first results of my research with international scholars present at this conference.

Short Bibliography:

Eglin, John. *The imaginary autocrat: Beau Nash and the invention of Bath*. London, Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord: Profile, 2005.

Large, David Clay. *The Grand Spas of Central Europe : A History of Intrigue, Politics, Art, and Healing*. Lanham (Md.): Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Lefebvre, Thierry, and Cécile Raynal. *Du thermalisme à la médecine thermale : aux sources du vrai made in France*. 1 vols. Parole publique. Paris: le Square éditeur, 2014.

Scribner, Vaughn. "The Happy Effects of These Waters." *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 409.

Société wallonne d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, ed. *Spa, carrefour de l'Europe des Lumières : les hôtes de la cité thermale au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris: Hermann, 2013.

Biography:

Sophie Vasset works on eighteenth-century medicine and literature in Great Britain. She is currently working on illness narratives, and on the cultural history of infertility. She teaches British literature and English-language theatre at the English department of Université Paris-Diderot and she is part of the LARCA research laboratory, as the co-director of the "Early Modernities" research group. She is a member of the steering committee of the interdisciplinary program "La Personne en Médecine" (USPC, 2014-18), and she is the current Director of the *Fondation des États-Unis*, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris.