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## Exceptions to the Rule of Gender: Ambition, Writing, and Subjectivity in Christine de Pizan, Jeanne d'Albret and Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu

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EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE OF GENDER:  
AMBITION, WRITING, AND SUBJECTIVITY IN CHRISTINE DE PIZAN,  
JEANNE D'ALBRET AND MARIE-CATHERINE DESJARDINS DE VILLEDIEU

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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in

The Department of French Studies

by

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For Barbara

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## Abstract

Critics often focus on how ambitious French women who were “exceptions to the rule of gender” disrupted egalitarian political structures that appeared after 1789. Geneviève Fraisse, for instance, theorizes that exceptional women in egalitarian systems such as democracies/republics pose a threat to patriarchal social order. In theory, all women in political circumstances such as these have the “right” to imitate the exceptional woman. The fear in “egalitarian” patriarchal societies is that all women might emulate the ambitious women who aspire to cultural echelons usually reserved for men. In a hierarchical regime, such as the *ancien régime*, exceptions are a normal, and at times celebrated, part of society. However, this does not imply that *ancien régime* women did not face adversity like ambitious women who appeared later in history. Indeed, the significance of the exceptional *ancien régime* woman has been largely ignored. My analysis fills this void by examining the early French woman writer’s importance as an exception to the rule of gender. Detailed analyses of *ancien régime* women’s texts reveal that exceptional women were indeed problematic in this era. Additionally, the personal experience of each writer, as evidenced through her works, illustrates that exceptional *ancien régime* women deftly negotiated social and political obstacles by writing publicly.

This study focuses on the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries and examines the lives and writings of Christine de Pizan (1364-1430), Jeanne d’Albret (1528-1572), and Marie Catherine Desjardins, also known as Madame de Villedieu (1640-1679). Comparing their life experiences reveals that in the case of these women, destabilized family structures ultimately led to an opportunity for public engagement through writing. Left on their own as widows, Pizan, Albret, and Villedieu wrote to maintain their autonomy. They subtly challenged social structures

that limited women, while recasting their own images in writing. Ultimately, their choice to write allowed them to achieve subjectivity in their lives and works.

**Chapter One:**  
**Exceptional Women of the *Ancien Régime*:**  
**Writing for the Public and Claiming Subjectivity**

When we tear the web of women's texts  
we discover in the representations of writing itself  
the marks of the grossly material,  
the sometimes brutal traces of the culture of gender;  
the inscriptions of its political structures. –Nancy Miller<sup>1</sup>

Over the past twenty years, many feminist critics working on French women writers and artists from eras previous to our own have addressed the notion of the exceptional woman.

Indeed, for a woman in earlier centuries to produce art or to write and wish to communicate her work to the public—whether or not she actualized that wish—was to run counter to conservative and usually dominant notions of proper femininity. A woman's ambitions to enter the public domain made her an exception to the rule of gender, for notions of proper femininity consistently held that women were to be modest, self-effacing, self-protective, and subordinate to men. Men, meanwhile, were the lords of the public domain, whether that be literary or political.

While in broad terms, this gender hierarchy characterized most epochs in France before the twentieth century when, in 1945, women got the vote, there are important distinctions to be made between pre- and post- Revolutionary France. Before 1789, or for my purposes, before the nineteenth century, certain women of the privileged classes could pursue their ambitions to write or produce art for the public with relative impunity.<sup>2</sup> As Geneviève Fraisse observes, the *ancien régime* tolerated exceptional women:

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<sup>1</sup> *Subject to Change* 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> I include the post-Revolutionary years of the eighteenth century, for Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, a member of the privileged classes enjoyed a public career as a painter and the benefits of a royal pension before the Revolution and continued her painting after as well. Mary Sheriff notes in *The Exceptional Woman*, “In the 1770s and 1780s, Vigée-Lebrun was busy identifying herself with Marie-Antoinette—rather than some other in/famous woman—and illuminates the multiple forces affecting Vigée-Lebrun's past and current reputation. Aligning herself with Marie-Antoinette's partisans at Court, the royalist artist would later find herself on the ‘wrong’ side of the Revolution. How ironic that when a woman is considered painter to a royal sovereign she has the misfortune of associating

. . . l'exception chère à l'Ancien Régime confirmait la règle et laissait la galerie des femmes célèbres sans conséquence sur l'ensemble des femmes. La femme exceptionnelle se glissait dans le monde des hommes ; après 1800, la femme exceptionnelle parle à toutes les femmes. En régime démocratique, l'exception peut faire règle, car ce qui est permis à l'une peut l'être logiquement à toutes. L'exception est une figure exemplaire, l'exemple d'une règle possible. (*La Raison des Femmes* 21)<sup>3</sup>

In Fraisse's terms, exceptional women are not perceived as a threat to a hierarchical society such as *ancien régime* France because they do not offer the possibility of change for all women.

Therefore, most critics prefer to examine how the exceptional woman troubles egalitarian political systems that theoretically offer women equal opportunity. In these systems, the exceptional woman questions age-old patriarchal tenets of men's superiority to women. In theory, she is a model for other women. "Patriarchal egalitarianism" or the "separate but equal" philosophy theorized in the eighteenth century and enacted during and after the Revolution, perceived female exceptions as a threat. For these systems to succeed, women and men were carefully divided, but the exceptional woman, by participating in traditionally masculine spaces, such as writing publicly, blurred that divide.

Most critics who address the exceptional woman echo Fraisse's theory and focus on post-revolutionary France and how the political implications of the republic/democracy complicated

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herself with the most vilified of queens. That Vigée-Lebrun after the Revolution continued to consider herself honored by the patronage of Marie-Antoinette is evident from her *Souvenirs*, written many years later" (Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman* 129).

<sup>3</sup> Fraisse expands on these comments later in her work: "[Le] vieux problème de l'exception et de la règle. Vieux problème car la femme exceptionnelle est une figure traditionnelle du discours masculin ; tolérée, voire admirée dans son originalité, elle ne trouble l'ordre public que pour mieux renvoyer à la règle ; elle fascine par la transgression même qu'elle représente. Or l'après-Révolution casse brusquement ce jeu parce qu'une simple évidence le rend impossible : ce que l'une peut faire, toutes ont potentiellement le droit de le faire ; l'exception peut, ou doit, devenir la règle. L'exception, reconnue comme telle, convient aux régimes politiques à forte hiérarchie ; elle est sans justification théorique dans un régime supposant l'égalité. On imagine que cela fasse frémir ; l'excentricité de l'une ou l'autre femme à apprendre le latin, faire de la philosophie ou des mathématiques, voire écrire un livre, devient un objet de peur si elle peut se transformer en règle usuelle. Mieux vaut donc refuser, combattre toute exception ; au lieu d'être rassurante, elle est devenue dangereuse. Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle fera tout par conséquent pour maintenir l'exception dans sa fonction ancienne qui par là même devient caricaturale : car dans l'Ancien Régime, l'exception était une évidence hors même de la vie intellectuelle et politique ; elle était coextensive à l'ensemble de la société, à cette forme de société" (Fraisse, *La Raison des Femmes* 53).

exceptional women's experience.<sup>4</sup> These studies that remain within the bounds of "egalitarian" systems have eclipsed the importance of this notion to the woman of the *ancien régime*.<sup>5</sup> Despite the greater leeway ambitious women had in the *ancien régime* to be accepted for their exceptional behavior—in my study, writing for the public—they still had to negotiate traditional gender roles, which meant they had to contend with both internalized ideas about proper femininity and external obstacles, such as disapproval by their contemporaries. I will analyze three cases from three centuries of *ancien régime* France to illustrate these negotiations. Using

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Michèle Riot-Sarcey and Eleni Varikas comment in their article "Reflexions sur la notion de l'exceptionnalité": "Essayer de comprendre les difficultés qu'ont les femmes à s'affirmer comme individus à l'intérieur d'un collectif pour l'émancipation peut nous aider à mieux saisir les mécanismes d'une oppression qui, depuis la XVIIIème siècle, est elle-même fondée sur une logique complexe d'exception qui vise à invalider ou annuler les prétentions qu'ont les femmes en tant qu'êtres humains à jouir des valeurs universelles et des droits humains" (87).

Another critic who addresses this concept is Christine Planté. Planté's article is titled, "Femmes exceptionnelles, Des exceptions pour quelle règle?" It is obvious in her article that this rule is in a broad sense Western social structure that favored men over women. Planté describes the sexual division characteristic of patriarchy, especially in France: "... l'idée que l'humanité est en fait composée de deux sous-espèces, l'une masculine, l'autre féminine, chacun ayant son fonctionnement physiologique, moral et intellectuel propre, partant, ses propres valeurs et ses propres lois, qui ne sauraient être confondues avec celles de l'autre sexe" (Planté 95). In particular, Planté wants to explore the implications of this designation for women writers in the "non-hierarchical" political climates of nineteenth and twentieth century. She concludes: "Si l'on veut rendre compte de la complexité des discours critiques et normatifs qui se tiennent à travers le XIXème siècle sur ce point, il faut ici faire intervenir en fait deux niveaux distincts d'exceptionnalité : le sexe féminin comme exception du genre humain, et les femmes exceptionnelles comme exceptions à la norme de leur sexe" (Planté 92).

One study that opposes Fraisse's theory is Mona Ozouf's controversial study *Les mots des femmes*. She rejects Fraisse's theory that exceptional women had a fundamentally different experience due to France's move from hierarchical regimes to a more "egalitarian" political situation. Since my study treats *ancien régime* exceptional women's experience as a separate, temporal vision "of the exception to the rule," Ozouf's generalizations do not offer any useful dialogue with my own. For example, Ozouf's refusal of Fraisse's and American Feminists' theories about the power of women in *ancien régime*, especially seventeenth-century, France affects her comments on exceptional women: "[In republics, women] were no longer anything of what they had been, but that former status had been largely illusory, and as soon as an illusion is set aside, a true equality must be substituted for it" (Ozouf 251). Viewing the notion from an *ancien régime* context, I do not perceive the power of salon women or royal women as illusory; rather, salons were a place, perhaps the only place outside of royal houses, where women could exact influence and wield any measure of power.

<sup>5</sup> The exceptional woman's role in the French Protestant Reformation is considered in John Thompson's *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*, but Thompson does not engage the concept of exceptional woman beyond this historical/religious framework. Thompson's comments indicate his use of "exceptional women" to elucidate the theories/strategies of Calvin: "... we will examine the influence of Calvin not of alternative theories but of exceptional women who embodied alternative examples simply by virtue of filling roles usually reserved for men" (48).

texts that were made public, I will show how their writing evidenced changes in self-perception, as they gained more experience in the cultural sphere.

Ultimately, for the women of my study, the adroit navigation of private and public spaces culminated in their search for and attainment of subjectivity, for the designation, “exception,” did not automatically grant women the status of “subject.” In fact, as I will show, by identifying gifted women with/as men, this social classification actually skewed a woman’s identity as a means to contend with the exceptional woman. Through an analysis of each writer’s works, I will show how each woman ultimately *chose* to seek subjectivity. In the cases I examine, the exceptional woman sought to exploit/overcome internalized and external patriarchal structures through writing meaningfully in the public sphere. As the first transhistorical study of exceptional women from the *ancien régime*, this analysis will nuance the discussions of Fraisse, and others by adding a temporal, comparative aspect to the notion of exceptional woman. I will show that this concept is just as complex in hierarchical regimes as it is in egalitarian ones by exploring exceptional women’s experiences in fifteenth to seventeenth-century France. As will become clear, it was never easy to be an ambitious woman, even in the *ancien régime*.

Even though there was more flexibility for exceptional women before the nineteenth century, they also had enormous hurdles. Mary Sheriff, in her work entitled *The Exceptional Woman*, addresses one woman’s experience at the end of the *ancien régime*. Sheriff examines the life and works of the painter, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Vigée-Lebrun was a “royalist artist” who painted before and after the Revolution. Despite her temporal circumstances, Vigée-Lebrun consistently identified with the aristocracy characteristic of the *ancien régime*; hence, Sheriff’s analysis dialogues with my own address of this era. In her analysis, Sheriff complicates

Fraisse's notion of the exceptional woman by examining the consequences of *exceptio firmat regulam*, a principle commonly known as "the exception proves the rule":

. . . the term, "exceptional woman," has a specific meaning and refers to the woman who, owing to some particular circumstance (talent, money, family ties, beauty, luck, political clout), has been exempted from rules or laws (be they perceived as natural, social, or statutory) prescribing the behavior of the female sex. In her recent book, *La Raison des femmes*, Geneviève Fraisse has suggested how the play of the exception and the rule related to women in *ancien-régime* France. . . . Although it remains unacknowledged in Fraisse's text, the concept of the exception and the rule articulated in the *Encyclopédie* [*exceptio firmat regulam*] underpins her argument that exceptional women trouble the public order only to reinforce its rules. Thus defined, the exceptional woman can only be a problematic role model for aspiring to her position implies collusion with the general subjugation of women. Separation from other women is the price a woman pays for her exceptionalness, and she pays it doubly since the exceptional woman was easily construed as the unnatural or unruleable (unruly) woman by men and women alike. (Sheriff *The Exceptional Woman* 2)

In this line of reasoning, the exceptional woman, therefore, is not an example for other women because she is not really a "normal" woman in the first place. She calls attention to/reinforces the rule of gender by violating it. This left the exceptional woman on society's margins, while her distinction from other, socially acceptable, women usually meant that she was perceived as an unnatural curiosity or "man-like." Karen Warren explains, in terms of "'Up-Down' thinking, which attributes greater value to that which is higher, or Up, than to that which is lower, or Down," that this association reinforced women's subordination to men in patriarchal society (46):

. . . women who seem to be an exception by occupying Up positions of power and privilege in male-dominated Up-Down societies are often portrayed in ambiguous gender terms: They tended to be seen either as not really women (they "think like a man," have "masculine" characteristics, or "are manly") or as women who have higher status or value relative to other women but lower status or value relative to dominant men (. . . "exceptional women" who have superior—because man-like—intelligence and reasoning powers, ambition and fortitude, courage and conviction). (52)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Later in this analysis, I will show how each of the women addressed exploited as "Ups" the roles that made them "Downs" in the first place. They used conventional figures and turned them on end. Additionally, I will show how their use of this figure was especially suited to their own personal situation and historical circumstances.

Women could never fully access public structures, because no matter their talents, they were always subordinate to men in a hierarchical, patriarchal society. All three women in this study were attributed masculine traits due to their ambition, as their societies, and later critics as well, attempted to define and control these exceptions to the rule of gender. The chapter analyses will show that each *ancien régime* woman faced a variety of difficulties, both internalized and external, before surmounting these hurdles and asserting her own identity through her writing, allowing her emergence as an early “feminist.”

Often, critical thought concerning *ancien régime* women will not grant these women the status of feminist writer or allow their actions to be interpreted as such. This logic arises from the idea that this critical tradition came later in literary history and is not applicable when used out of its own context. However, Nancy Miller reevaluates feminism to contend with the phantom of anachronism. Miller’s definition of “feminist writing” is important because it does not insist on restricting the concept historically:

In part because of these<sup>7</sup> kinds of historical connections, in part because of the theoretical complications it raises (about reading literature in history), despite my sense that a poetics (even of gender) needs to be grounded, I have not sought to tie a definition of feminist writing to the historical moments of feminist movements or currents. (*Subject to Change* 20, n. 10)

Considering that the historical period I want to address is not concurrent with what are considered the major “feminist movements,” Miller’s view allows me to evaluate the exceptional women of my study in light of feminist theories. By incorporating a temporally sensitive definition, I hope to render my analysis of *ancien régime* exceptional women and their writings

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<sup>7</sup> Although (for me) there is some ambiguity in what exactly “these” is referring to, I read Miller’s comment as referring to the intertext between her writing on feminism and that of Rachel Duplessis, which deals with a “very different corpus” (Miller, *Subject to Change* 20). It seems though, in the context of the discussion, this intertext could also be the relation between texts from different periods which speak to a feminist ideology however we choose to define it.



relevant to current discussions surrounding feminist thought and women's place in literary history.

In order to articulate the ways in which women grappled with their status as exception and found new modes of identity, I will examine Nancy Miller's definition of feminist writing. Miller offers her definition with the following disclaimer: "As a poetics derived from a specific cultural production, the description of feminist writing that follows is not meant to bear the weight of a universal authorship. If it sketches a horizon of writing that will enable other cartographies and other scenes, it will have served its purpose" (Miller, *Subject to Change* 8). I will accept Miller's invitation and nuance her ideas with my own.

Miller offers her definition of feminist writing that can be applied to periods in history like the *ancien régime* that are not linked to "the historical moments of feminist movements or currents":<sup>8</sup>

At a first level, then, feminist writing articulates as and in a discourse of self-consciousness about women's identity. I mean by this both an inherited cultural fiction and a process of construction. Second, feminist writing makes a claim for the heroine's singularity by staging the difficulty of her relations as a woman in fiction to Woman. Third it contests the available plots of female development or *Bildung* and embodies dissent from the dominant tradition in a certain number of recurrent narrative gestures. . . . Finally through an insistence on singularity, feminist writing figures the existence of other subjective economies, other styles of identity. (*Subject to Change* 8)

Miller's definition works particularly well for the writers I will address with one significant addition. I will apply the tenets of Miller's feminist writing to the dialogue between a woman's life and writing—especially when the woman writer poses or can be read as the "heroine," or protagonist, in her own work. Each woman engages the concept of Woman—the dominant myths of femininity—through writing the individual self as subject to cultural constraints even as

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<sup>8</sup> With this definition, Miller seeks to offer a framework in which a feminist theory of writing can be applied to periods long before the modern notion of feminism began.

the self struggles to be free. I will return to Miller's definition in Chapter Five to offer a synthesis of how, in these terms, the women of my study may be termed feminist writing subjects, as well as exceptional women.

The writers I have chosen for this analysis all fit the mold of the exceptional woman as defined by Sheriff and Fraisse; they countered social expectations as "exceptions to the rule," and they were talented (writers). As will become evident through the chapter analyses, each of these women participated in "feminist writing." Through their writings, and sometimes even their lives, they transcended or subverted patriarchal constraints while maintaining identities engaged in cultural production.

From the fifteenth century, I have chosen Christine de Pizan (1360-1430), the first French woman to live by her pen. Many women in the sixteenth century either participated in literary circles or engaged in religious reform. From this period, I have chosen Jeanne d'Albret, an autonomous Queen who, at one point in her life, was the most powerful Protestant in France and whose writings championed her cause. Finally, from the seventeenth century, peopled with the likes of Madame de Lafayette and Madeleine de Scudéry, I have chosen Marie-Catherine Desjardins, also known as Madame de Villedieu. A product of salon culture, where women and men wrote collaboratively and often published anonymously, Villedieu went on to write on her own and boldly sign the majority of her published works.

### **Christine de Pizan**

Apart from the works of Marie de France and the *trobairitz*, France did not produce many woman writers before humanist currents ushered in the Renaissance during the reign of François

I.<sup>9</sup> Christine de Pizan is one of the few who left a vast œuvre and integrated autobiographical sketches into her works. Critics like Charity Willard have gleaned additional information concerning her life and writings from fourteenth and fifteenth-century historic record.

Pizan is the only writer examined in this study that can be termed exceptional solely due to her writing, for she was the only French woman living by her pen in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. She also is the only woman of this era to engage in public literary debate. During the *Querelle de la rose*, scholars from the University of Paris praised Jean de Meun's *Le roman de la rose*. Pizan sided with scholars like Jean Gerson to argue that the work, especially its portrayal of women, was immoral.

Obviously Pizan's transgression of society's rules required a special dispensation that could have been due to her status as a foreigner. Her father, who was an astrologer at Charles V's court, was originally from Italy.<sup>10</sup> The French court was familiar with Italian humanist currents, and Pizan may have been tolerated as a novelty linked to the distant, "tolerant" Italian milieu. As a writer, when no other women earned their living by the pen, she is the exception to the rule. Pizan's move from a socially acceptable woman to a self-conscious writer will be traced in Chapter Two.

### **Jeanne d'Albret**

Albret wrote in the sixteenth century, when many other women were writing. Her famous mother, Marguerite de Navarre, is just one example. The poet, member of the *Pléiade*, and women's educational advocate, Louis Labé, is oft-cited as well. As the Protestant

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<sup>9</sup> François I reigned from 1515-1547. It is possible that many French women's works prior to this era have not survived.

<sup>10</sup> During the course of this analysis, "Italy" does not refer to what we know as the modern European country. Instead, I use this term to refer to Pizan's native land, which, at that time was geographically situated in modern-day Italy.

Reformation grew in France, Albret and other Protestant Queens like Renée de France wrote about their newfound religion.

Albret is an exception to the rule, for she wrote as an autonomous queen; her writings issued from her alone with only her signature, and she publicly supported the Protestant cause both in her reign and her writings. Even the Catholic Queen of France, Catherine de Medici, dealt with her son, Charles IX, and the demands of the Catholic League during her regency. Renée de France, Duchess of Ferrera, never publicly declared her Protestant faith, even after the death of her ultra-Catholic husband.<sup>11</sup> Renée's family ties to the powerful Catholic Guises ultimately extinguished her public involvement in the Reformation. Albret, on the other hand, openly opposed her husband's vacillating religious views, and in 1560 declared herself a Protestant. After his death in 1562, Albret worked on her own to transform her domains into a Protestant haven. In 1568, she publicly declared her engagement in the Wars of Religion. Albret had no family to influence her like Renée, and she had no male influence to answer to like Catherine de Medici. As a powerful autonomous queen, Albret is the exception to the rules governing powerful royal women. Her unique status as a truly autonomous queen likely led to her active leadership and bold writing during the Protestant Reformation. Albret's journey from "adolescent pawn" to autonomous Protestant queen will be traced in Chapter Three.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Renée of France, 1510-1575, daughter of Louis XII and wife of Hercule d'Este, Duke of Ferrera, was much influenced by Marguerite in her youth, as her correspondence shows. Eighteen years younger than Marguerite and eighteen years older than Jeanne, Renée's religious position may also have been at a midpoint between them. Her extensive correspondence with Calvin, her protection of many Huguenots, and the presence in her household of a Calvinist chaplain, François de Morel, show that her connection with the reform was much stronger than Marguerite's, but she never became a public convert, like Jeanne after 1560" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 18). For an in-depth discussion of Renée de France's Protestant activities before and after her husband's death see Charmarie Blaisdell's "Calvin's Letters to Women." *Sixteenth Century Journal*. 13.3. Autumn 1982. 77-84.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Roelker terms Albret an "adolescent pawn" in her work, *Queen of Navarre*. Roelker uses the term to reference Albret's status as the only heir to a kingdom that did not adhere to Salic law—that is the mandate that kingdoms may not be inherited by women, although women could serve as regents until their sons reached the age of majority. Albret's husband would become King of her lands and inherit her fortune, and her family, including her mother, father, and uncle sought to exploit her value as a political tool.

## Marie-Catherine Desjardins, Madame de Villedieu

Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu wrote in the seventeenth century, when more French women wrote than ever before. This was due, in large part, to the formation of the literary salon. Women writers found a place to express themselves in the salon culture of the seventeenth century. According to Joan DeJean,

When women from the highest ranks of the aristocracy had literary aspirations, they turned to men possessing literary talent and expertise...[and] other members of their salons. . . . The group effort that may be called “salon writing” played a very different role for the powerful women who orchestrated these activities: it allowed them to fulfill their own literary aspirations at the same time that it served as the founding gesture of their salons by involving the members of their circle in literary activity. Salon writing provided an authorization, from the highest rank of court society, for women’s writing. (*Tender Geographies* 23)

Along with Villedieu, the most recognizable seventeenth-century salon women writers are Madame de Lafayette<sup>13</sup> and Madeleine de Scudéry. Lafayette and Scudéry wrote collaboratively in the salons. Scudéry, a bourgeois like Villedieu, held her own salon. Scudéry signed many of her works with her brother’s name and stayed within the bounds of collaborative, “salon” writing.<sup>14</sup> Although this is the environment in which Villedieu started her career as a writer, she eventually abandoned collaborative writing and the anonymous publication that usually accompanied it. Micheline Cuénin further distinguishes Villedieu from Lafayette and Scudéry:

. . . la carrière de cette femme de lettres représente un cas à la fois original et exemplaire. Original, car voici la première romancière [du dix-septième siècle] qui non seulement signe ses oeuvres, mais leur doit sa subsistence, dût-elle passer sous les fourches caudines d’un libraire insatiable [Claude Barbin]. Tandis que le roman ne représente pour Mme de Lafayette qu’un passe-temps d’aristocrate, pratiquement inavouable, que Mlle de Scudéry

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<sup>13</sup> Marie-Madeleine Pioche de Lafayette’s *La Princesse de Clèves* is widely considered the first modern novel.

<sup>14</sup> On the use of her brother’s signature, DeJean comments that Madeleine de Scudéry signed her works with “‘M. de Scudéry’ because her brother Georges was also a writer” (*Tender Geographies* 224, n. 5). On her collaborative writing, DeJean comments, “Scudéry’s vast novels are the most elaborate product of seventeenth-century French salon writing: they could only have been completed with the collaboration of writers responsible for specific questions. We cannot be certain that the actual writing was a joint venture. However, in all the seventeenth-century coteries [salons] from which novels were generated it was common to circulate manuscripts for suggested rewrites” (*Tender Geographies* 73).

jouit des revenus de N.-D. de la Garde, de la pension royale accordée à son frère qui lui sert de prête-nom pendant longtemps, Mlle Desjardins n'a pu compter que sur son esprit pour assurer son existence, même si elle fut encouragée et inspirée par une grande princesse. (Cuénin 715)

Unlike Scudéry and Lafayette, Villedieu's writing was her only source of income. At times during her career, she wrote volumes just to make ends meet.

Villedieu's writing solidifies her status as an exception to the established rule. Villedieu wrote plays, the "king's genre," when other literate French women, aristocratic or bourgeois, did not dare. Not only did she write plays, but her most successful attempt, *Le favory*, was clearly not a collaboration, like her earlier play *Manlius Torquatus*, and was well-received by Louis XIV. Additionally, she purposefully wrote the play on her own to separate herself from a literary quarrel surrounding *Manlius*, written with the abbé d'Aubignac. After *Manlius*, Villedieu avoided collaboration, wrote on her own, and signed almost all of her works. She distinguished herself further from the collaborative, salon writing of Scudéry and Lafayette, who published anonymously or under men's names. For these reasons, Villedieu is an exception to established social/literary rules. Villedieu's amazing journey from beloved of the salons, to jilted lover, to disenchanted writer, and finally to a woman who managed to reconcile her public and private lives through her writing will be examined in Chapter Four.

### **Historical Perspectives of the *ancien régime* Exceptional Woman Writer**

Before exploring each woman's specific journey in the chapter analyses, I would like to analyze the historical implications of their status as exceptional women to illuminate the similarities and historical specificities of *ancien régime* exceptional women's lives and writings. First, I will discuss the historical circumstances that fostered the appearance of exceptional women like Christine de Pizan, Jeanne d'Albret, and Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu. All three authors wrote at some point in their career during a period of social upheaval and/or

weakness in the monarchy. For Pizan, France was torn by the conflict between Louis of Orléans and the duke of Burgundy, and Charles VI's insanity did not help to keep order.<sup>15</sup>

Jeanne d'Albret's story is a bit more complicated. Her mother, Marguerite de Navarre, kept close ties to King François I, her brother, and he allowed her and her Evangelical contemporaries to write freely.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, in 1521, he yielded to pressure from the University of Paris and strengthened royal control over intellectual endeavors, but Marguerite continued her private writing. Albret inherited this intellectual legacy. After François I's death in 1547, Henri II assumed the throne until his death in 1559 left his widow Catherine de Medici as regent for the juvenile Charles IX. Medici's regency was plagued with conflict between opposing Catholic and Protestant factions. In addition, the Wars of Religion began again in 1562 and served as the backdrop to much of Albret's later writing.

As for Villedieu, whose talents were developed in Madame de Montbazon's salon, she entered salon culture after the *Fronde*, an aristocratic revolt against the French crown from 1648-1653. Other *salonnières*, like Mlle de Montpensier, played vital roles in the *Fronde*, and the *Frondeuses* returned from exile and channeled their energy into salon culture, which separated itself from the crown. Villedieu's early writings appear when Louis XIV had not yet consolidated his power, and she completed most of her works before Louis XIV's permanent move to *Versailles* in 1672, when most social, cultural, and artistic life was centered in one locale—the King's palace.

### **The Social Experience of Pizan, Albret, and Villedieu**

*Ancien régime* society received the three writers similarly. As women, they had to negotiate between social expectations of Woman (the dominant ideology of femininity) and their

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<sup>15</sup> See note 104.

<sup>16</sup> See note 132.

own ambitious visions of themselves, for society constantly endeavored to define them against traditional ideas of Woman. Their singular talents intrigued social commentators; sometimes social observers viewed them as curiosities and even praised them. Frequently, their critics expressed horror at the “monstrosity” of a woman clearly breaching male territory. In other words, they had their champions and their detractors. Christine de Pizan’s patrons, contemporary writers and scholars, and many others praised her. Traditional members of the University of Paris who were offended by a woman speaking in public debate despised her. Jeanne d’Albret was praised by contemporary poets and, of course, other Protestants. She was sharply criticized by supporters of Catholicism, including the papacy, because of her religious beliefs and her status as an autonomous queen. Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu’s salon contemporaries praised her in the late 1650’s, and her published works were very popular during her lifetime. However, living as a single woman in Paris and writing scandalous poetry only gave her detractors reason to gossip. Tallemant des Réaux’s account of Villedieu in the *Historiettes* clearly shows that her reputation was not safe from slander.<sup>17</sup> Each of these writers dealt with praise and criticism similarly during their lives—they simply kept writing and remained single women, despite social, economic, and even political pressure.

Socially, each of these women stood on different ground. Christine de Pizan was of the court nobility, but lost her financial security when her husband and father died. Albret was queen of her parents’ and husband’s domains, including Albret, Béarn, and Vendôme. Villedieu was a bourgeois with little social clout. How did these women end up writing?

Christine de Pizan had an intellectual father and husband, and as an adult, educated herself. When her husband and father died, she wrote to earn a living. Albret, whose mother and

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<sup>17</sup> See page 51.



grandmother, Louise de Savoie, were intellectual women, took it as her birthright to write. She carried on the tradition of learned women in her family, and her involvement in the Protestant Reformation gave her an outlet to write publicly. Villedieu, who spent time with her mother who worked as a servant in the salons, happened upon the only place in French society where social mobility was possible for a bourgeois. Her talent as a writer was appreciated and cultivated in the salon milieu, and she adopted this culture and its permissive environment as her own, despite her own continued financial struggles. Like Pizan, she also earned her living by the pen.

Despite their disparate social standing, all three shared a family structure destabilized by a weak or deceased father and an absent or estranged husband. Pizan's writing career began over a decade after her father's and husband's deaths, so she wrote as a fatherless widow. Albret wrote both before and after her husband's and father's deaths, so she also wrote as a fatherless widow. Villedieu was a special case. She was never officially married to Antoine de Boësset, sieur de Villedieu, despite various engagement and marriage contracts that were drawn up between them. Nevertheless, after his death, Villedieu received permission from his family to write under the pseudonym, Madame de Villedieu. Essentially, from her arrival in Paris in 1655, living "sous sa bonne foi,"<sup>18</sup> Villedieu was an independent and single woman.<sup>19</sup> Writing as single women, Pizan's, Albret's, and Villedieu's works are their own and are not directly controlled by any masculine influence. I will show that this destabilization in family structure had an effect on their ability to write publicly, and even more importantly, on their writing's contents.

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<sup>18</sup> See page 143.

<sup>19</sup> Villedieu's father is of little consequence to her story after her arrival in Paris. However, her mother's separation from him and the subsequent move to Paris changed Villedieu's life by exposing her to salon culture. After imprisonment for debts in 1661, Guillaume Desjardins's status steadily declined and he died in 1667, arguably the most disastrous year of Villedieu's life.

The death or absence of any male influence changed their lives and writings irrevocably. Although Pizan, Albret, and Villedieu had little control over this event, they were left alone in the world to determine their own fate. For Pizan and Albret, widowhood was the means by which they kept their freedom to pursue their own interests. They laid claim to their exceptionality through their writing after being widowed. Pizan was interested in advising others with her own voice, and Albret, once free, was concerned with confidently expressing her own opinions, not those of her father, mother, or husband. Villedieu's earlier composition of drama and writing of erotic poetry distinguished her from other seventeenth-century women writers, yet, as I will show, up until her lover's death, she reinforced a stereotypical vision of the woman writer through her fictional representations of woman. Her lover's death marks a turning point in Villedieu's writing. By writing back (with her *Nouveau recueil de quelques pieces galantes*) against the unauthorized publication of her letters, which her lover likely sold for his own profit, Villedieu sought a literary economy in which a woman writer and her writings could coexist as separate, but equal, entities.

Other aspects (apart from absent fathers/husbands) of the writers' family status also influenced their literary production. Pizan and Albret were both mothers, and as I will show, both used maternal identity to their full advantage in order to define themselves. This strategy worked well in the social environments of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Women, even in the Reformation's eyes, were the caretakers of children. Motherhood was the greatest goal set for women by society. To be the mother of a son meant even more in the days when landed families and royal houses looked eagerly for the male heir. Young women were simply political bargaining chips whose only value lay in their status as daughters to be married. This probably explains why Pizan and Albret focus almost exclusively on their sons and leave their daughters

out of their writings. Pizan's daughter is rarely mentioned, except as an aside about another mouth to feed, and Albret's daughter, Catherine, is usually subsumed into the category of "my children," when Albret writes about her trials as a mother.

The "maternal" worked for Pizan in another way in her texts. Pizan began her writing journey imitating what I will term "paternal" models. In fifteenth-century Paris, noble intellectual women were few and far between, so Pizan looked to her father as an example. Consequently, she imitated her father's model of participation in the public domain. Through her later works, Pizan discovers the "maternal" mode of writing. In short, she successfully creates a mode of writing that derives its authority from Pizan's experience, not that of her father. She creates a model for women's cultural production, and as I will show, this move from the paternal to the maternal model is most evident in her texts written for men.

The "maternal" went beyond her son, Henri, for Albret as well. Since more is known about Albret's life, and writings from her youth are available, other reasons may exist for Catherine's absence in her mother's political writing. Catherine was not born until February 1559, and by the time Albret wrote her memoirs, Catherine was only nine years old—not old enough to play an important part in her mother's political writings. Her brother, Henri, was the current heir to Albret's crown, so he took precedence. However, Albret did write a series of letters just after her conversion to Protestantism that can be considered "maternal" writings and that address the conversion to Protestantism of an "adopted" daughter.

Additionally, Albret's use of the "maternal" in her later writings show that she did not define herself by her role as mother; rather, she exploited this socially acceptable role to her own advantage. In her writing as an autonomous queen, Henri is as much of a political tool as she

was years earlier when she protested her arranged marriage.<sup>20</sup> I will show that Albret, in her political writing, did not center her identity in her children, as her mother, Marguerite de Navarre, so clearly did in letters written to Albret. Rather, Albret, in her writing, defined her role as mother to suit her own needs.

Villedieu, on the other hand, was not a mother. She was never really married to her lover although she used his name after his death. When Villedieu came to writing in the late 1650s, she encountered a milieu that devalued marriage and family. In many cases, marriage and family were considered oppressive by *salonnières*, and their writings often openly discouraged marriage. Lougee comments, “And it was precisely the *précieuses* who not only rejected the necessary maternal role but loudly preached against it. As we have seen, there was no family in the salon, which by design negated the family” (90).<sup>21</sup> Villedieu, as a young single woman, found herself in the only social milieu where her behavior—living independently from her parents in her own room and writing—was acceptable. The “maternal” would not have been the right model for Villedieu to express herself. In seventeenth-century France, a woman writer could write through a figure of her independent self, and indeed, that is just the path Villedieu took to find her subjectivity.

### Writing Across the Centuries

Despite the differences in their social and literary experiences, similarities in their writings abound. All present themselves in their writing. Pizan represents herself in the majority of her works, and she is often the main character. For example, her most studied work, *Le livre de la cité des dames*, presents Pizan as a student who dialogues with three allegorical teachers:

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<sup>20</sup> See page 87.

<sup>21</sup> As Lougee explains in *Le paradis des femmes*, the salon negated the family because marriage and motherhood occurred exclusively in the isolation of the family unit; therefore, salons and their collaborations between men and women negated the familial intimacy of private space. For more on this topic, see Lougee 85.

*Raison, Droiture, and Justice*. Albret depicts herself in her memoirs, her poetry, and in her political letters. Villedieu portrays herself in several of her prefaces and in her letters as well. The different ways that these women integrate their lives into their texts reveals a poignant difference in their use of self-representation.

The astonishing trend is that as the centuries wear on, the cases I have examined, show that women had less of a stake as writing themselves, as clearly named characters, in their texts. In the majority of Pizan's long prose works, she clearly identifies herself as the "Je" who speaks. Albret rarely uses her name in her poetic works, yet she frequently uses her name in her political works. Villedieu identifies herself in her prefaces and occasionally in her letters, but frequently, the only indication of her presence in the text is pseudonyms or references to life events similar to her own. In some cases, the only way to know that Villedieu wrote a text is to look for the author's name and even that is missing occasionally. This phenomenon reflects the centuries in which the authors lived. Pizan could only lay claim to her work by including her name and life story in the text itself. Albret did not rely on her writings to earn a living, yet her name and literary portrait carried meaning when attached to royal edicts or Protestant propaganda. Villedieu, in the seventeenth century, had a vested interest in managing her identity, as misconceptions of her life proliferated in the public sphere.

Another similarity between the three women is that all wrote in a variety of genres—from letters to poetry to personal life accounts or memoirs. For Pizan and Villedieu, this was likely a reflection of changing literary tastes, whereas for Albret it was directly related to her rise as Protestant leader. Each woman knew how to exploit genre according to her particular situation.

Pizan began her career with short courtly poetry at the turn of the fifteenth century, but later moved from long poems to even longer prose works that pleased her patrons. Albret wrote

poetry before her days as an autonomous queen, but after, her writings were strictly political and prose, either official government documents or prose works and letters meant as propaganda for the Protestant cause. Villedieu is perhaps the best example of this phenomenon. She began her career entertaining her salon contemporaries with controversial, yet irresistible, sonnets like “Jouissance.” After a brief stint as a literary portraitist, Villedieu went straight for drama, the “highest” genre in seventeenth-century France. After holding her own with *Le favory*, Villedieu abandoned drama for other genres. She continued to write poetry, but poetry was secondary to her *nouvelles*, early “novels,” and published letters. She even exploited her own exploitation when her personal love letters were published against her will in 1668. That same year, she published the *Recueil de quelques lettres et relations galantes*, a work that reframed the circumstances of the earlier purloined correspondence and, in appearance at least, restored her authority over her own writings.

The most significant similarity between the writings of these *ancien régime* women is that all three eventually reconcile their negotiation of Woman with their own ambition. They deliberately counter or reshape social dictates to allow their own subjectivity to emerge in their writing. Pizan’s definitive literary moment is in *Le livre du corps de policie*. By finding the courage to speak in her own voice to all of French society, Pizan affirms that she is worthy and qualified to address the public sphere as a woman. Albret achieves this reconciliation in her *Mémoires*, when all her opinions come together in a unified way to oppose the Counter-Reformation and announce her official entry into the Wars of Religion. In her last work, *Les désordres de l’amour*, Villedieu reclaims her own identity through her character, the Princesse de Guise. Guise is a gifted and praised writer, and Guise’s subjectivity runs parallel to her esteemed writings. Guise’s life and subjectivity remain untouched by her texts, yet they

ultimately drive the narrative's events and have great importance. In this case, the woman and her works are separate, but equal.

To end this discussion of the transhistorical characteristics of exceptional women's writings, I will address the denouement of these important moments. Essentially, each woman writes politically during and sometimes after this definitive moment in her literary career, addressing public matters that go beyond the traditional sphere of women's private life. Christine de Pizan's work, *Le livre du corps de policie*, is an address to all citizens of France that uses the metaphor of the body politic to instruct. Jeanne d'Albret, a queen in her own right, wrote many political treatises and authored royal edicts. Her memoirs are a political justification of her entry into the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion. Many of her letters, as a queen, are usually related to political matters. Villedieu is again complicated, but her last work, *Les désordres de l'amour*, describes a force that changed history irrevocably and caused political turmoil—love. Villedieu wrote private life into politics in her last work, making love the foundation for the second round of the French religious wars, civil unrest in the kingdom, and finally, the death of one of Henry IV's allies in the Wars of Religion. Both Pizan and Albret directly address matters of state, Pizan with only her strong opinion and erudition to back her, and Albret leaning on the authority of her crown. However, Villedieu takes a circuitous and unlikely route to politics—love. Relying only on her salon background, Villedieu infiltrates the public realm by taking advantage of the private sphere. Using women like herself, who love without being loved, or women who resist this suffering, she emphasizes women's worth—and the *cœur* they possess—to the political world of *esprit*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See note 176 for a more-detailed discussion of *cœur* and *esprit*.

**Chapter Two:**  
**Paternal Visions, Maternal Ambitions:**  
**Christine de Pizan's Instructive Writings for Men**

God gave you the gift of Solomon,  
your heart is given to teaching—as God demanded  
from him; you are devoted to study, and thus follow  
in the footsteps of the good master Thomas of  
Bologna, whom I knew, I remember it well.  
Your father was a doctor of astronomy; Charles V by no  
means forgot him, but recommended him for his great  
abilities—and you followed him in the seven  
learned arts. Your achievements stand alone in the  
French realm.

Ah what a worthy honor among women and men

—Eustache Deschamps<sup>23</sup>

Eustache Deschamps offers his contemporary, Christine de Pizan, unmeasured praise in this early fifteenth-century ballad. She is a teacher and an intellectual whose accomplishments were beyond compare—for a woman that is. No French woman of this era wrote professionally as she did, yet social constraints kept her from developing her intellectual gifts until long after her father's death. Although Deschamps harmoniously intertwines the intellectual paths of father and daughter, Christine's experience tells another story.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The text of this ballad is taken from Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee's *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* 112. This poem was a response to Christine's "... [1404] letter to the famous poet Eustache Deschamps (1346-1404 or 1407), also known as Eustache Morel, [that] expresses Christine's feeling about the decay she sees everywhere in her society. It also shows that she was intent on intellectual networking by keeping in touch with the notables of her time" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 109). For more information on the ballad, see Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 112, n.6. For a detailed account of the relationship between Christine and Deschamps see "Fathers and Daughters: Christine de Pizan as Reader of the Male Tradition of the *Clergie* in the *Dit de la Rose*" by Lori Walters in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Kate Forhan writes, "As a general rule of thumb, when looking for a shorter form of the name, if the name has an 'of' referring to a place, the person is called by the Christian name. John of Salisbury is called 'John' by scholars, Christine de Pizan is 'Christine.'" (*The Book of the Body Politic* xxxii). The use of "Christine" to refer to Christine de Pizan imitates the pattern seen in the author's texts. In more than one text, Christine uses the formula, "Je, Christine..." in order to name herself. A specific instance is in her *Cité des dames*, "Et je, Christine, respondis a tant:" (Curnow 876). Using "Christine" instead of "Christine de Pizan" also follows Charity Cannon Willard's usage in her biography of Christine de Pizan, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*. Persea Books, New York: 1984.



Countless critics have recounted Christine de Pizan's extraordinary life story.<sup>25</sup> She left a fair amount of autobiographical information that has been used, along with historical documents, to piece together the events of her life. Christine began her life within the private sphere as a dutiful daughter and devoted wife and mother. Christine reevaluated her past after disastrous events exposed her to the rigors of public life. These musings served as her impetus to break social codes through her self-education and writing. Therefore, Christine's emergence as an exceptional woman is evident in the chronology of her life and works. I will include a brief biography here based on Charity Willard's thorough analysis, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, to put in relief the foundation for her exceptional endeavors.

Christine wrote in French, but her family was actually from Pizanna situated geographically in present-day Italy. She came to France as an infant, shortly after her birth around 1364. At the age of four, Christine and her family joined her father, Thomas de Pizan, in Paris. Christine's father served as court astrologer to Charles V. She enjoyed a carefree childhood at court and at the age of fifteen, in 1380, she was married to a young notary, Etienne de Castel. Her marriage was a happy one, and she had three children, a daughter, Marie, in 1381, a son in 1382 who died as an infant, and soon after her son Jean was born. In the same year that Christine was married, Charles V died. Her father's popularity at court waned soon after Charles V's death. Consequently, Christine's family began to experience some hardship due to her father's fall in status.

In 1386, Christine's father died which was a serious blow to the family. Not only did his death destabilize the family structure, but he also left behind large debts. Shortly after, in 1389,

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<sup>25</sup> Biographers such as Marie-Joseph Pinet, Régine Pernoud and Charity Cannon Willard have synthesized historic autobiographical information with traces of Christine in the public record to present useful, yet varied, portraits of this well-known writer.

Christine's husband died. After his death, the family's financial situation became even worse, and Christine's brothers left Paris and returned to Bologna in hopes of claiming rights to their father's estate. Left with a mother, a niece and children to support, Christine scrambled to find a way to make ends meet. Fourteen years of lawsuits culminated in her gain of the unpaid salaries of her husband and father, as well as rights to her father's disputed holdings.

Although some financial support came from her father's estate, Christine still needed to provide an income for her family. Despite receiving no serious scholarly instruction as a young woman, she educated herself as an adult. She began to write and secure royal patrons, and through her writing she eventually overcame her financial difficulties to become France's first female professional writer.

Obviously, Christine's journey from the sheltered family world into the cold reality faced by the fifteenth-century widow was not an easy one.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to her father's university background, Christine was not formally educated. Nevertheless, Christine's autodidactic pursuits, along with her writing career, culminated in her appearance as a royal political adviser in her writings. She ambitiously expanded the scope of her father's profession by appearing as an adviser to all levels of French society, in her writings to men as well as women. In the process of aspiring to roles considered unsuitable to her sex, Christine eventually made these roles her own by exchanging a paternal model for a maternal one.

In order to illustrate this phenomenon, I will examine three of Christine's texts designed to advise a male audience—two written before her works for women, the *Enseignemens moraux*

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<sup>26</sup> Widowhood was no unique state of affairs in fifteenth-century France due to the Hundred Years War, not to mention the plague. Christine experienced the worst kind of widowhood in that she found herself financially destitute with no male relations to champion her cause. Widows with no money and no connections had few choices. Although she might have considered remarriage, she could bring nothing but debt to any future husband. In addition, her three small children, a niece, and the care of her mother prevented her from going to a convent. It is not known whether Christine tried to remarry, but in any case, she remained single and in so doing became even more vulnerable.

and the *Epistre Othea*, and one written just after, *Le livre du corps de policie*. I have chosen to compare these texts written for men, for they allow me to show how Christine's authorial voice changes/emerges over the course of her writing and how, after writing for women, Christine expressed herself in a new way. Trends in paternal and maternal representation will guide the analysis from Christine's early days of emulating her father to her later work that undermines his influence while valorizing her own maternal role.

Christine began her career as adviser with two instructional texts, the *Enseignemens moraux* and the *Epistre Othea*, a mirror for princes. These early instructive texts reveal how Christine modeled her own intellectual endeavors after her father, serving as a father substitute for her son in the *Enseignemens moraux* and advising royalty through a thinly veiled prophetic representation of herself in the *Epistre Othea*. In these texts, subtle content reveals Christine's dissatisfaction with the paternal model.

Christine did not return to the mirror for princes genre until after her involvement in the debate over the *Roman de la rose* and her "feminist" *prise de conscience*. Christine's autobiography, *L'Advision Christine*, dating from this period shows that the author turned from a paternal to a maternal model of cultural production. The theory presented in her autobiography manifests itself in her *Livre du corps de policie*.

Written after Christine explored alternatives to overarching patriarchal limitations of women, *Le livre du corps de policie* contrasts sharply with Christine's earlier instructive texts addressed to a male audience. By tracing paternal echoes from Christine's early instructive texts to *Corps de policie*, I will show that Christine leaves the paternal model behind, seeking alternative modes of intellectual engagement that allowed women a stake in the decidedly masculine realms of cultural production and public life.

I will begin this analysis of Christine's instructional texts for men by exploring how the author mimicked her father in her earliest instructive text, the *Enseignemens moraux*. In this work, Christine, as a father substitute, offers advice to her son, Jean. Following her own paternal model, Christine focuses on intellectual life, yet she also reproduces and modifies elements of her own experience as a woman. In order to establish the "paternal" model of her childhood, I will first examine Thomas de Pizan's experience and participation in family life, especially as it pertains to his daughter. By comparing Christine's musings on her own traditional upbringing with the advice she offers her son, I will show that she not only emulates, but also subtly questions and expands the scope of her father's model.

### **Christine's Paternal Model of Family Life**

The prevailing scheme of fourteenth-century education associated the father with scholarly pursuits and public life and the mother with home life and the private sphere. In this respect, Christine's mother and father reflected the status quo of this era's Parisian family. A daughter's duty was to mirror her mother, not her father. Therefore, a clear divide existed between socially acceptable feminine and masculine behavior. Christine's paternal model of education challenged this social dictum.

Christine claims that her father promoted an alternate mode of gendered behavior that blurred this divide and promoted women's intellectual development. Christine portrays her father as a forward-thinking man with unorthodox ideas. Her famous *Livre de la cité des dames* offers this commentary:

Ton pere, qui fu grant naturien et phillosophe, n'oppinoit pas que femmes vaulsissent pis par science apprendre, ains de ce qu'encline te veoit aux lettres, si que tu sces, grant plaisir y prenoit. (876)

Your own father, who was a great astrologer and philosopher, did not believe that knowledge of the sciences reduced a woman's worth. Indeed, as you know, it gave him great pleasure to see you take so readily to studying the arts. (141)<sup>27</sup>

Formed by humanist ideas, Thomas de Pizan approved of his daughter's interest in study.<sup>28</sup> His flouting of social dictates reached across gender boundaries—at least in theory.

Although Christine claims that her father recognized his daughter's intellectual gifts, he never acted on his innovative ideas. Despite the many references praising her father that permeate her texts, Christine's works do not indicate that Thomas de Pizan made a concerted effort to educate her, despite his liberal beliefs about women's education. Instead, he deferred to his wife's judgment and allowed Christine's mother to raise a socially acceptable daughter.<sup>29</sup>

Christine was prepared for an "ideal" future life of marriage and family where intellectual pursuits would be of little use. Her father's endorsement only goes as far as study, and no indication exists that his daughter, or any Parisian woman for that matter, might go on to use such skills in the public sphere. The *sciences*<sup>30</sup> would be of little use to prepare Christine for an ideal life in the private world.<sup>31</sup> As the author continues her commentary in the *Livre de la cité des dames*, she writes,

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<sup>27</sup> The French text of the *Cité des dames* is from Maureen Curnow's 1975 thesis, and the English citations are from Rosalind Brown-Grant's translation. The numbers provided are the page numbers in the respective editions.

<sup>28</sup> Although his approval of Christine's education might have been atypical, he certainly was not the only father who acknowledged his daughter's intellectual gifts. Margaret King's article, "Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism In The Early Italian Renaissance," examines the experience of learned women during the Italian Renaissance. According to King, "Women humanists were born in families that specialized in learning. Some even came from families that specialized in learned *women*. . . . Learned women, therefore, came from a limited set of environments specifically favorable to their education and advancement. They were educated typically by men. Some were educated by their fathers. . . . Other women were educated by tutors" (67-68).

<sup>29</sup> This probably accounted for no evidence of a tutor in this home. Thomas de Pizan concerned himself with his son's education (and Christine might have sat in), while Christine's mother educated her daughter.

<sup>30</sup> Christine defines "science" as ". . . toutes choses ou il couvient garder droites rigles d'ordre et de mesure qui bien la veult faire que on peut appeller ycelle maniere d'ouvrer par mesure science" (" . . . anything which has correct rules of order and measure that ought to be kept can be called a science") (*Corps de policie* 125/*Body Politic* 70).

<sup>31</sup> In any case, according to Willard, "The period of her youth available for intellectual pursuits was brief, since, according to accepted custom, by the time Christine was fifteen years old a husband had been chosen for her" (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 34). Furthermore, Willard comments, "The title of Maître would imply at least a certain exposure to the liberal arts as preparation for legal or notarial training, and the young man was a

Mais l'opinion feminine de / ta mere qui te vouloit occuper en fillasses selonc l'usage commun des femmes, fu cause de l'empeschement que ne fus en ton enfance plus avant bootee es sciences et plus en parfont. (876)

Rather, it was because your mother, as a woman, held the view that you should spend your time spinning like the other girls, that you did not receive a more advanced or detailed initiation in to the sciences. (141)

Christine's mother prepared her for married life by encouraging her daughter to adopt socially acceptable behavior. Hence, Christine's paternal model offered eccentric possibilities, while the reality of her situation reinforced the status quo.

This paradox is even reflected in the husband Christine's father chose for her. She was fifteen when she married Etienne de Castel. She comments,

. . .comme mon dit pere reputast celui plus valable que le plus science avec les bonnes meurs avoir, avisa ung jeune escolier gradué, bien né...de qui les vertus passoient la richesce; ...En ce cas ne me plains je de Fortune, car droit eslire en toutes convenables graces, si comme autre fois ay dit, | a mon gré mieulx ne voulsisse. (*Advision Christine* III.IV)

Since my father thought that the most worthy man possessed both great learning and good character, he looked to a young scholar and graduate, well-born, . . . whose virtues surpassed his wealth. . . . In this matter I make no complaint against Fortune; for truly, in all the proper graces, I would not have essayed to choose better by my own wishes. . . . (*Christine's Vision* III.4)<sup>32</sup>

Thomas de Pizan chose a man like himself to serve as a father substitute, as the university educated Etienne was connected to Charles V's court. By offering his daughter a cultured husband, Christine's father once again acknowledged the intellectual bent that Christine had exhibited in her childhood. His choice offered her the same tantalizing possibilities she experienced as his daughter, yet the rigors of marriage and child raising would leave her little

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notary by profession. About twenty-five at the time of his marriage, he was in the same year made a royal secretary, a lifetime appointment. During this period the royal secretaries were the intellectual elite of Paris." (Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 34-35) See also Willard's comments on the humanist connections of Christine's husband on page 47 of *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*.

<sup>32</sup> The French text of the *Advision Christine* is taken from the edition by Christine Reno and Liliane Dulac. The English text is from Glenda McLeod's translation. The *Advision* is divided into three sections. The first number provided refers to the section number. The second refers to the specific chapter within that section.

time for scholarly pursuits. Her father's good intentions harbor the paradox of Christine's paternal model—replaying the same educational scenario in marriage she experienced with her father. In her youth, Thomas de Pizan allowed Christine's mother to train her in socially acceptable roles in lieu of scholarly pursuits, and in marriage, those same roles erased any possibilities opened by providing her with a learned husband.

The major features of Christine's early education are clear. She had an intellectual bent that was not developed, despite her father's liberal ideas. The education she received reflected the society in which she lived—a society where a scholarly woman had no place. She was perfectly equipped for an ideal life in the private sphere, as she moved directly from home life with her parents to marriage with her husband. This model of education might have sufficed, if not for extraordinary circumstances that forced her into the public world.

Christine's *Enseignemens moraux* appeared after her ideal world was shattered by the deaths of both her husband and father. My analysis will show that Christine poses as a father substitute for her son, as she engages the paternal model of her youth. Christine's childhood education, life in the private sphere, and her subsequent trials in the public sphere combine to offer an instructive work that simultaneously emulates and questions her own upbringing.

### *Enseignemens moraux*<sup>33</sup>

The *Enseignemens moraux*<sup>34</sup> open with a dedication to her son: "Les enseignemens que Je Christine donne a Jehan de Castel, mon filz" (The teachings that, I, Christine, give to Jean de

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<sup>33</sup> Until fairly recently, the *Enseignemens moraux* have remained in obscurity behind Christine's "feminist" writings like *Cité des dames*. Christine Reno and Elisabeth Shulze-Busacker have expressed interest in the *Enseignemens moraux*. Reno's study focuses on the legacy of Christine's *Enseignemens moraux* and analyzes manuscript evidence of the text's influence in later centuries. Shulze-Busacker identifies much of the source material Christine used for the *Enseignemens moraux*, as well as highlighting Christine's innovations to the genre. Although these studies reveal much about Christine's influence in the manuscript tradition, little analysis of the content in relation to Christine's life and instructive role has occurred.

Castel, my son.) (27).<sup>35</sup> Despite this personal dedication, this work's popularity extended beyond her family and contributed to Christine's reputation as a writer.<sup>36</sup> The subtitle establishes her as Jean's adviser, a role Christine takes on in the absence of any male relative.<sup>37</sup> Although never mentioned in the text, memories of Thomas de Pizan and his intellectual substitute, Christine's husband, permeate the *Enseignemens*.<sup>38</sup>

Christine emulates her father by focusing on intellectual development. The *Enseignemens* appear to be in a more scholarly vein than many similar texts of the day. Maurice Roy writes in *Oeuvres Poétiques de Christine de Pizan* that Christine's *Enseignemens* did not appeal to popular dictums, but rather looked to philosophers of the past: "laissant de côté les dictons populaires, elle s'attache surtout à reproduire les sentences des anciens philosophes" (III, V). The author's emphasis on the importance of study for any profession Jean might pursue supports Roy's observation:

Lis volentiers belles hystoires  
Quant tu porras, car les nottoires  
Exemples sont souvent valables  
Et font gent devenir savables.

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<sup>34</sup> Christine Reno in her article, "Christine de Pizan's *Enseignemens moraux*: Good Advice for Several Generations" writes, "We cannot know exactly when the *Enseignemens moraux* was written, but the probable date of composition coincides with the departure of Christine's young son, Jean du Castel, to England. That most likely occurred towards the end of 1398, when he left for the household of the Earl of Salisbury, . . ." (1).

<sup>35</sup> Apart from this page number reference, all references to individual *enseignemens* are to the *enseignement* number in Maurice Roy's edition of *Oeuvres Poétiques de Christine de Pizan* that contains the only modern transcription of the *Enseignemens moraux*. The translations of the *Enseignemens Moraux* are mine.

<sup>36</sup> Christine Reno comments, "The testimony of surviving manuscripts of Christine de Pizan's works copied outside of her workshop, most of these after her death, shows that the *Enseignemens moraux* was one of the author's most enduring works. Twenty later manuscripts containing it are known to exist, . . ." ("Christine de Pizan's *Enseignemens moraux*" 6). In addition, the 113 *enseignemens* are octosyllabic quatrains with a rhyme scheme of a/a b/b. This form would have made easy memorization for students and likely ensured their inclusion in didactic compilations.

<sup>37</sup> Like his mother, father, and grandfather, Jean was also an intellectual. Reno comments, "Jean du Castel was born in the mid 1380s . . . she writes of him in the *Advision* that he was a fine young man with exceptional intellectual talents. . . ." (Reno, "Christine de Pizan's *Enseignemens Moraux*" 6).

<sup>38</sup> This work will be referred to as the *Enseignemens* when speaking of the work itself. When speaking of one particular quatrain, *enseignement* will be used, and when speaking in general about several quatrains, *enseignemens* will be used. This follows Christine Reno's use in her article, "Christine de Pizan's *Enseignemens moraux*: Good Advice for Several Generations."



Willingly read good stories  
When you can, because their respected  
*exempla* are often valuable  
And people who read them become wise.

However, not all works are worth reading, as she immediately checks this advice:

Ne croy pas toutes les diffames  
Qu'aucuns livres dient des femmes,  
Car il est mainte femme bonne,  
L'experience le te donne. (37)

Do not believe all the slanderers  
Whose books speak of women,  
Because there are many good women,  
[Your own] Experience shows you this.

Women like his mother are his proof, as Christine echoes her father's liberal ideas concerning women's worth. She encourages her son not to believe what he reads about women—much like her father looked beyond social strictures and approved of women moving outside their socially prescribed role through study. She specifically cautions her son about misogynist texts: “De la Rose ne lis le livre” (Do not read the [*Roman de la*] *rose*) (77). She also provides him with a list of authors she approves.<sup>39</sup>

Another way in which she echoes the paternal model of education is her scheme for educating girls and boys. She reproduces the reality of her own education, rather than her father's innovative ideas. Christine encourages Jean to take his future sons' scholarly work very seriously. Christine writes,

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<sup>39</sup> Se tu veulz lire des batailles  
Et des regnes les commençailles,  
Si lis Vincent et aultres mains,  
Le Fait de Troye et des Rommains. (78)

Pour devocion acquerir  
Se tu veulz es livres querir  
Saint Bernard et aultres auteurs  
Te seront enice fait docteurs. (79)

If you want to read about  
the first battles and kingdoms,  
Read Vincent and beyond that,  
The deeds of Troy and the Romans.

To learn about devotion  
If you want to search in books  
Saint Benard and other authors  
Will be for you the authorities.

Tez filz fay a l'escole aprendre,  
Bat les se tu les vois mesprendre,  
Tien les subgiz en cremour  
Et leur celes grant amour. (95)

Make your sons learn at schooling,  
Beat them if you see them misbehave,  
Keep them in fear  
And hide from them great love.

This “tough love” approach contrasts sharply with the next quatrain in which she outlines his treatment of his future daughters:

Tien tes filles trop mieulx vestues  
Que bien abuvrées ne peues ;  
Fay les aprendre bel maintien  
Ne point oyseuses ne les tien. (96)

Keep your daughters so well/tightly-clothed  
That they won't be able to drink deeply  
Teach them good countenance  
Keep them from idleness.

As for his daughters, she is less concerned that they attend school and more concerned that their clothing and their manners are socially appropriate (96).<sup>40</sup> Christine follows social dictates here, reproducing the educational model of her childhood.

Christine's emulation of the paternal model is coupled with subtle undertones of discontent. She cautions her son concerning her own regrets, expressing a latent dissatisfaction with the paternal model she emulates. In the *Enseignemens*, Christine defines the importance of youth to future life:

Trés ta joennece pure et monde  
Aprends a congnoistre le monde  
Si que te puisses par aprendre  
Garder en tous cas de mesprendre. (3)

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<sup>40</sup> Christine's own daughter, Marie, was probably around seventeen years old when the *Enseignemens moraux* were written.

Take advantage of your youth  
Learn to know the world around you  
As much as you can by learning  
To keep yourself from misunderstanding.

The author encourages Jean to use his youth to learn everything he can about the world as a young man, so he will not go astray later in life. This passage's significance becomes clear when viewed in tandem with her later work, the *Advision Christine*. In this work, Christine regrets that she did not take full advantage of intellectual influences when they were readily available to her.<sup>41</sup> She addresses her own "youth" disdainfully:

Tant haïr te dois, quant ou temps que j'estoie a mesmes les ·II· beaulx conduis de philosophie, coste si haultes fontaines tant cleres et sines, et moy comme fole jeune trop mignote, non obstant que les biaux ruissiaux me pleussent, ne m'en emplissoie. . . . Tant fis grant dommaige a mon entendement, qui ne le me laissas durer jusques en l'aage de plus grant congnoissance! (*Advision Christine* III.IX)

I must detest you, since when I was at the two founts of philosophy themselves—those noble fountains so bright and wholesome—I, like a young and pampered fool, took not my fill of them, even though the beautiful water pleased me; . . . You grievously injured my understanding when you did not allow these things to last for me until the age of greatest comprehension. (*Christine's Vision* III.9)

The author acknowledges in these lines that her life as a youth was so sheltered that she did not look beyond the boundaries of her ideal world. As an embattled widow, she is fully aware in the *Advision* how much she could have learned from her husband and father (the two founts of philosophy), if only they had not sheltered her.

Her regret, coupled with the advice to her son, reveals Christine's discontent with the inadequacy of her own upbringing as a socially acceptable woman. This discontent appears in even more relief when she makes an allusion to her own public struggles:

Se pues par bel ou par grant cure  
Le tien pourchacier, n'aies cure

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<sup>41</sup> Do we believe Christine when she paints herself as a frivolous youthful girl, or is this just a way of portraying herself that works to her advantage. Is it a self-defense against misogyny?

De mouvoir plait ou a maint triche,  
Car a peine est grant plaideur riche (83)

If a rich, well-known official/person  
harasses you, do not bother  
to request a trial in court where trickery abounds,  
Because rarely does a plaintiff win his case.

Considering the lawsuits in which she was engaged for over fourteen years, Christine knew all too well the corruption of the legal system.

Her dissatisfaction with her own traditional education manifests itself in the hope she has for her son's future. Through her son, she dreams of possibilities far beyond a woman's reach. Although the most specific career advice surrounds Christine and her father's intellectual leanings, she advises her son considering a number of possibilities. As a man, Jean would have ready access to more opportunities, and it must have been a real pleasure for her to offer guidance concerning governors (15), knights (13), and even clergymen (19). In offering her son so many future possibilities, Christine moves beyond the limitations of her own youth and sex.

Her father may have been an intellectual, but Christine, as a young girl, could only access one option, that of the private sphere, marriage and family. Christine sends her son into the world armed with the knowledge that he has options for his future, and she gives him the wisdom reaped from her own experiences as an intellectual. She also shares with him wisdom garnered from her experiences as a wife, mother, and widow.

By sharing knowledge of private life, Christine valorizes the education she received from her own mother. The author provides her views of the private/familial sphere in addition to advice concerning the public/intellectual sphere. This overlap actively questions established gender boundaries. For Christine, these spheres are not mutually exclusive, for both have served her in different phases of her life.

Specifically, in the *Enseignemens*, Christine offers her son advice from a woman's perspective concerning his future family life. She does not hesitate to guide him in matters of the heart. She even dictates the choice and treatment of his wife—especially poignant is her address of battered wives:

Fay toy craindre a ta femme a point  
Mais gard bien ne la batre point, . . . (94)

Make your wife sufficiently afraid  
But refrain from ever beating her, . . .

Phrases like these often stop feminist-minded, modern readers in their tracks, yet in fifteenth-century Paris, this was progressive social commentary. Drawing on her knowledge of women's experience, Christine sought to offer her son something more than the ideal backdrop that had crumbled when she faced the public world. Part of this process was acknowledging that all women did not have nice husbands and lead ideal private lives sequestered from the world's ugliness.

This privileging of the real over the ideal is reflected near the work's conclusion. Christine appeals to her son to teach his children both practically and intellectually and to provide for their future:

Ne te dampnes pas pour acquerre  
A tes enfants avoir et terre;  
Fay les aprendre et entreduire  
A science ou a mestier duire. (111)

Do not neglect to acquire/seek  
for your children holdings<sup>42</sup> and land  
Teach them and introduce  
them to *science* or an appropriate profession.

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<sup>42</sup> The term "avoir" as used by Christine is difficult to translate. It means the act of having or possessing items of worth.

Christine's father did not leave her financial security or an intellectual legacy, nor did he entertain the possibility of anything but an ideal life for his daughter. On the contrary, he left her in debt and with no way to earn her living. The theme of financial security, of *avoir* and *terre*, are important, and one passage specifically cautions against her father's pitfall:

Ne tiens maignée a ton loyer  
Si grant que ne puisses paier,  
Car souvent par trop gent avoir  
On despent la terre et l'avoir. (84)

Don't keep your household at a cost  
So large that you cannot pay it,  
Because often by having too many people (servants)  
One exhausts land and holdings.

She passes on this valuable life lesson to Jean, and her view of youth's potential in this text is much more optimistic than that of her own presented in the *Advison Christine*. In the *Enseignemens*, Christine has high hopes that, unlike her, Jean will use his youth to prepare his future career and benefit from her experience in the private and public spheres. In this work Christine is the father substitute, surpassing her father's model of education by preparing her own son for whatever the future might hold, good or bad.

The *Enseignemens* served as a place for the author to address many aspects of her own education, both practical and intellectual. Her comments about the courts in conjunction with her advice against *Le roman de la rose* gives this text a balance of scholarly and practical advice for her son. Through this work, Christine subtly challenges the paternal model of education in the private sphere. With her next instructional text, the author looks to the public sphere, as she emulates her father's public roles in order to advise royalty. In order to examine how Christine engages the public sphere by exploiting paternal influence, let us first take a closer look at the different stages of her father's professional life.

## Christine's Paternal Model of Public Life

Charity Willard describes Tommaso di Benvenuto da Pizzano's, known more commonly as Thomas de Pizan, background: "[He] was a native of Bologna, born there in the early years of the century" (Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 17).<sup>43</sup> Christine's father also attended the University of Bologna where he pursued a degree of doctor in medical studies and remained as a lecturer in astrology.<sup>44</sup> Willard writes,

At the time, Bologna was not only one of the great intellectual centers of Europe along with Paris but it was one of the two most important centers for book production. Unlike the University of Paris, however, Bologna's faculties did not rest on religious foundations, and from the beginning many of its professors were laypersons. To have studied at the University of Bologna implied having been exposed to some of the best and most progressive thought available, and to have rubbed elbows with some of the most intelligent people of the day. (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 17)

The differences emphasized here probably explain Christine's claims that a woman lectured in her father's place at the University of Bologna, the same university her father attended.<sup>45</sup> In this

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<sup>43</sup> Willard continues, "His family owed its origin to the village of Pizzano . . . it was only in the sixteenth century that French printers gave the family a spurious connection with the city of Pisa and so began to misspell the family name using the letter s" (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 17). See also the introduction to Kate L. Forhan's translation of Christine's *The Book of the Body Politic*, xxxii.

<sup>44</sup> According to Pearl Kibre's entry in the *Dictionary of Medieval Civilization*, "Astrology was especially honored in Italian universities where there were separate chairs in the subject. . . and those who predicted the future on the basis of their increasingly elaborate and detailed knowledge of the positions, orbits, and motions of heavenly bodies, won plaudits and renown not only from their academic peers but also from the chief potentates of Europe" (133). Astrology was defined during the Middle Ages as ". . .the belief in the rule of the stars, that is the supposed influence of the heavenly bodies on human affairs, and especially on the states of health and disease of the human body. . . ." (Kibre 134).

<sup>45</sup> As Christine converses with the allegorical character of Rectitude in *Cité des dames*, Rectitude says, "Giovanni Andrea, the famous legist who taught at Bologna nearly sixty years ago, similarly opposed the view that women should not be educated. He gave his beloved daughter Novella, a fine and lovely girl, such a good education and detailed knowledge of law that, when he was busy with other tasks which prevented him from lecturing to his students he could send his daughter in his place to read to them from his professional chair" (*City of Ladies* 140-141).

Whether Novella was real or not, evidence of women teaching at Bologna does exist. Melinda Blade explains, "For example, Dorotea Bucca (1400-1436) occupied a chair of medicine at the University of Bologna, lecturing with distinction, on full par with her male counterpart at the University, and others elsewhere" (31). Ferrante adds, "The daughter of a professor of moral philosophy and practical medicine, herself *laureata* in philosophy, Dorotea Bocchi taught her father's students publicly with great success, after his death" (Ferrante 18, 39, note 57). There is some discrepancy here over dates and spellings. Blade claims Bucca lived from 1400-1436 while Ferrante claims Bocchi taught in 1390 at the University of Bologna. For a more complete discussion of

respect, the Parisian intellectual climate was decidedly more closed to women than that of Bologna.<sup>46</sup>

Both the French and Hungarian monarchs invited her father to join their courts as astrologer.<sup>47</sup> Court astrologers were commonly found in this era's European courts and enjoyed an influence that extended beyond the cliché of modern-day palm readers and crystal balls. For instance, a fourteenth-century astrologer fulfilled many duties, including that of King's personal advisor and physician. Marie-Josèphe Pinet remarks about Christine's father, "Ce « supellatif ostrologien » devait savoir beaucoup de choses et du passé et du présent, plus que de l'avenir. Il avait étudié à Bologne. Il avait vécu à Venise. Le droit, comme la médecine, ne pouvait lui être étranger. Sa science politique est attestée par sa place au conseil de la République" (9).<sup>48</sup>

Due to his affiliation with the University of Bologna and his time in Venice, Christine's father was in touch with the (Italian) humanist currents that offered women some degree of participation in the "professions," such as medicine and law.<sup>49</sup> His association with these

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women at the university or in medicine during this period, see page 18 of Ferrante's article, "The Education of Women in the Middle Ages."

<sup>46</sup> See note 59.

<sup>47</sup> Willard claims that demand for her father's services by Louis II of Hungary and Charles V of France was due less to his reputation, and more accurately "to suppose that it was the prestige of the University of Bologna that was solicited" (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 20).

<sup>48</sup> Living in Venice had a profound effect on his philosophy and eventually, on his daughter's future life. Fourteenth-century Venice, as Willard describes it, was "an extraordinary city, unlike any other of its day. It can be claimed that the Venetians were both democrats before the age of democracy and capitalists before the capitalistic era. ... Venetians were thus exceptionally cosmopolitan..." (Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 16). Due to his affiliation with the University of Bologna and his time in Venice, Christine's father was in touch with the (Italian) humanist currents that offered women some degree of participation in the "professions," such as medicine and law.

<sup>49</sup> Christine's father's professional formation in Italy allowed for liberal ideas on women's education, but I do not mean to imply that fourteenth-century Italy was a utopia for educated women and their participation in public life: King laments, "Male humanists praised learned women extravagantly. . . . In an age when learning was prized, learning in women was prized as well—all the more because it was rare. But such praise is treacherous. For the women who competed with learned men [were] not admitted to the company of men—yet they were excluded from the company of women... Like divine miracles, they were both wondrous and terrible; ... Male by intellect, female in body and in soul, their sexual identity was rendered ambiguous:" (75) Intellect was never considered natural to a woman during this period. Although the humanist reveled in the learned woman as a marvel or bizarre anomaly, the



currents might explain the author's insistence that he did not object to women's education.

Christine addresses these aspects of her father's life—that of an open-minded professor, a royal adviser, and an astrologer—in her next instructive text, the *Epistre Othea*.

### *Epistre Othea*

The *Epistre Othea* features a goddess created by Christine, who teaches fifteen-year-old Hector of Troy how to be a chivalrous knight.<sup>50</sup> Othea tells Hector his future, as she offers him advice. In the tradition of prophetesses like the Cumaean Sybil, Christine speaks through Othea to the future leader of France, Louis, Duc de Guyenne. Christine's tribute to her father is immediately apparent in the *Epistre Othea*'s prologue.

D'umble vouloir, moy, povre creature,  
Femme ignorant de petite etature,  
Fille jadis philosophe et docteur  
Qui conseiller et humble serviteur  
Vostre pere fu, que Dieu face grace,  
Et jadis vint de Boulogne la grace  
Dont il fu né, par le sien mandement,  
Maistre Thomas de Pizan, autrement  
De Boulongne fu dit et surnommé,  
Qui sollempnel clerc estoit renommé,  
En desirant faire, se je savoie,  
Chose plaisant qui vous meïst en voye  
D'aucun plaisir, ce me seroit grant gloire,

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majority opinion leaned toward a more traditional role of woman as dutiful daughter, wife and mother. During this time, a woman was normally educated according to her sex, rather than her abilities. Blade remarks, “. . . the humanist contemplated an equal range of subjects and standards of achievement for both Italian Renaissance boys and girls . . . however, the humanist, while educating girls, was not attempting to change the status of women: the humanist might offer the girls the same educational subject matter as boys, but . . . women's primary duties were ‘home, social life, the rearing of children, the practice of charity and religious obligations’ [in keeping with] the humanist's philosophy that woman's first care should be a well-ordered life and practice of religion. To help girls attain this goal, the humanist presented educational subjects to girls which emphasized those aspects of her training” (Blade 33).

<sup>50</sup> Othea, a goddess of wisdom, is apparently Christine's creation. “Othea n'est pas une des déesses connues de l'Olympe. Il s'agit, en effet, de la première attestation de ce nom, sur l'origine duquel plusieurs critiques se sont déjà interrogés. . . . Le nom Othea correspondrait à une féminisation du répons «Agios o Theos» d'un chant liturgique our le Vendredi Saint connu au moyen âge. «Agios o Theos» était traduit en latin par «Sanctus Deus», ce qui pouvait amener un auditeur ne connaissant pas le grec à établir une équivalence entre *Otheos* et *Deus*. Othea serait donc la divinité au féminin” (Parussa 37, n.20). According to Parussa, a less convincing option is that Othea might be an adaptation of the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena.

pour ce entrepris ay, d'indigne memoire,  
 Presentement ceste oeuvre a rimoyer,  
 Mon redoubté, pour la vous envoyer  
 Le premier jour que l'an se renouvelle;  
 Car moult en est la matiere nouvelle,  
 Tout soit elle de rude entendement  
 Pourpensee, car je n'ay sentement  
 En sens fondé, n'en ce cas ne ressemble  
 Mon bon pere, fors ainsi com l'en emble  
 Espis de blé en glenant en moissons  
 Par mi ces champs et coste les buissons,  
 Ou mietes cheans de haulte table  
 Que l'en conquelt quant li mes sont notable;  
 Autre chose n'en ay je recueilli  
 De son grant sens, dont il assez cueilli.<sup>51</sup>

.....  
 Moy, nommee Christine, femme indigne  
 De sens acquis, pour si faite oeuvre entreprendre,  
 A rimoyer et dire me vueil prendre  
 Un epistre qui a Hector de Troye  
 Fu envoyé, . . . (Prologue)<sup>52</sup>

Moved by humble desire, I, poor creature,  
 Ignorant woman, of little importance,  
 Daughter of the philosopher and doctor of yore,  
 Who was the counselor and humble servant  
 Of your father—God be merciful to him—  
 And who came long ago from Bologna “the wealthy,”  
 Where he was born, by his [Charles V's] order,  
 Master Thomas of Pizan, also  
 Called and surnamed of Bologna,  
 Who was renowned as an eminent scholar.  
 Desiring, if I only knew how,  
 To make a pleasant thing that would lead you  
 To some pleasure, I would consider this to be to my glory;  
 For this reason I presently have undertaken  
 --from an untrustworthy memory—to rhyme this work,  
 On the first day the year renews itself;  
 For its subject matter is all new,  
 Though it is unpolished in its thought, for I am not well  
 grounded in *sens*. In this I do not resemble my good father,<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The French citations are from Gabriella Parrussa's *Christine de Pizan: Epistre Othea*.

<sup>52</sup> The *Epistre Othea* has a prologue followed by one hundred sections each consisting of a quatrain, a prose gloss, and a prose allegory. When citing the work, the section number will be used.

except in so far as one  
Steals grains of wheat while gleaning during the harvest,  
in the fields and along the bushes;  
Or as one picks up the crumbs falling from the  
High table, when the dishes are worthy of note.  
I did not gather anything else  
Of his great *sens*, of which he had gathered plenty.

.....  
I, named Christine, unworthy woman,  
But having the *sens* to undertake such a work,  
Will begin to rhyme and tell about  
A letter that was sent to Hector of Troy, (Prologue)<sup>54</sup>

Thomas de Pizan's presence is more than just an homage to her father. Christine leans on his authority. According to Kate Forhan, a common feature of the mirror for princes genre is the humility topos. Forhan observes that many mirrors include ". . . the author's claim to be unfit by his or her qualifications or background, but resolute in writing nonetheless, either at the request of the prince or for his good" (Forhan 31-32). Christine's choice to define her limitations using her father makes her humble self-introduction unique. Not only does she make this distinctive use of the humility topos, she takes the opportunity to eulogize her father's intellectual and professional life. She authorizes her own writing by simultaneously emphasizing her deficiency (as part of the humility topos) and mastery of the *sens* that served as the basis for her father's intellectual endeavors. She mentions his days as a scholar in Bologna, as well as his service at Charles V's court as royal adviser. The text begins with this mini-portrait, and its details are fresh in the reader's mind when the character, Othea, begins to speak in the first person.

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<sup>53</sup> The word, *sens*, here and later, has been left untranslated in order to highlight the connection between Christine's references to her father's *sens* and her own later in the prologue. Possible translations are sense and understanding.

<sup>54</sup> This translation is from *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee.

The character, Othea, presents another prologue that mirrors the first in form, but the humility topos disappears. Christine's character is a confident speaker:

A toy Hector, noble prince poissant,  
Par mon epistre amonnester  
Te veuil et dire. . .  
.....  
Et comme deesse je sçay  
Par science, non par essay  
Les choses qui sont a venir,  
.....  
Je suis celle qui tous arroie;  
Ceulx qui m'aiment et tiennent chiere  
Je leur lis leçons en chayere  
Qui les fait monter jusqu'au cieulx;  
.....  
Or mets dont bien en ta memoire  
Les dis que je te veuil escripre,  
.....  
Saches qu'ilz sont en mes pensees  
En esperit de prophecie. (1)

To you, Hector, noble and powerful prince  
.....  
By my letter I wish to counsel  
You, . . .  
.....  
And as a goddess I know  
By *science*, not trial and error,  
The things which are to come,  
.....  
I am she who counsels all  
Those who love me and hold me dear.  
I read to them their lessons in chair,  
Which enables them to mount to heaven.  
.....  
Now put it well into your memory  
The deeds that I wish to describe to you.  
.....  
Know that they are in my thoughts  
In the spirit of prophecy. (1)<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> All the French citations of the *Epistre Othea* are taken from Gabriella Parussa's 1999 edition. English translations of the *Epistre Othea* are taken from Jane Chance's *Christine de Pizan's The Letter of Othea to Hector* unless otherwise indicated.

Othea's prologue echoes elements of Thomas de Pizan's portrait: a lecturer's chair, advice to royalty. The passage even adds the prophetic aspect of her father's profession neglected in Christine's prologue.<sup>56</sup> I read this prophetic figure as a feminized version of Christine's father. She mirrors the scholar at the University of Bologna lecturing from his chair. She advises a royal prince. Finally, her advice stems from knowledge of the future.<sup>57</sup>

In the first prologue, Christine did not mention her father's astrology, but Othea's words evoke his profession. If we accept the definition Christine offers of *science*, Othea emphasizes that she knows the future based on "droites rigles d'ordre et de mesure," just as Christine's father would predict the future based on the established tenets of astrology.<sup>58</sup> Christine models her spokesperson after her father in many ways, yet Christine's prophetic figure is a woman like herself.

Othea appropriates public roles that excluded fifteenth-century Parisian women. She is a teacher, an adviser, and adept at the *science* of prophecy, yet she is a socially acceptable

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<sup>56</sup> In her article, "Christine's Anxious Lessons," Roberta Krueger argues that feminine prophetic figures like Othea are failed teachers (21). Othea predicts Hector's death while she is advising him, so all her words are useless to help him avoid his fate. She also emphasizes Cassandra's failure to convince anyone that her prophecies were true (35). For Roberta Krueger, "Christine refutes the misogynists' charges of women's intellectual deficiency and proves by historical example that women have been and can be learned teachers and virtuous models of good government. But she also shows how women's teachings have often tragically failed either to transform human perceptions or to influence historical events. . . . Self-education and the instruction of others are processes that are fraught with social and personal anxiety throughout Christine's work" (36). Instead of reading these figures as failed teachers that reflect Christine's anxiety, I see Christine's prophetic figures as echoing her father's legacy as royal adviser. Through their voices, she leans on her father's authority and effectively spreads her message.

<sup>57</sup> In *The Allegory of Female Authority*, Maureen Quilligan explores Christine's choice to use sibyls in the *Cité des dames* as a maternal reflection. Quilligan comments, "As virgins, the sibyls are not of course themselves mothers, but they are powerful female figures who are bound together in a tradition that, as an alternative to a masculine scripted legacy, speaks to the transtemporal generativity of female knowledge" (128). As in the *Epistre Othea*, traditional sibyls give their knowledge to one prince or one king and their sole purpose is to impart knowledge, they are not touched by it. She adds, ". . . such female sapiential style as that of the sibyls is related to the gendering of females as persons more loyally tied to their mothers—as Christine herself is" (130). I believe that Christine's use of sibylline figures in her texts was more a reflection of a paternal loyalty than a maternal salute.

<sup>58</sup> See note 30.

representation of woman.<sup>59</sup> Although Christine could not aspire to roles reserved for men, goddesses in classical literature commonly advised princes and kings about future events.

By seizing upon the powerful goddess figure, Christine molds her father's legacy into a socially acceptable vision of a woman adopting forbidden public roles. Just as she uses her status as a single parent to advise her son outside of a traditional feminine context, Christine finds a rhetorical loophole through which she authorizes a woman, Othea, to advise men.

For the duration of the text, Christine permanently yields the first person pronoun, "I," to her fabricated goddess. It seems as if Christine embraces the paternal model and keeps her appropriation of her father's public role of royal adviser in a socially acceptable feminine rhetorical space. She leans on his authority to authorize her textual production and advising. The use of a prophetic figure by the daughter of a famous astrologer renders her unorthodox activities even more acceptable. Additionally, Christine does not take his role for herself, but allows an exception to the rule, a goddess, to speak on her behalf in a society that normally required men to advise other men. Christine authorizes her female spokesperson further by following a second convention of the mirror for princes. The author claims that all her material came from another source, Othea's letter to Hector. The author is simply the reporter and cannot be held responsible for the content.<sup>60</sup> Christine poses as the innocent transmitter of information and is blameless for her transgressions of traditional advising scenarios.

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<sup>59</sup> Only men were allowed to teach and attend the University of Paris, and the practice of "licensing" further prevented women from participating in professions such as law and medicine. Ferrante notes: ". . . the education of men was moving in a different direction. . . . [It was] a much more formal training in specialized areas of law, medicine, and theology, aimed at preparing men for careers in government, university teaching, the professions, or the church. Professionals received degrees by examination and were usually not allowed to practice without a license or official sanction. Since women could not attend university, by and large they were excluded from these fields;" (Ferrante 17-18).

<sup>60</sup> "The humility topos results in reliance on ancient authorities for advice rather than daring to speak one's own unworthy thoughts and reveals the second important convention: the writer is 'merely' passing along the wisdom of others, . . ." (Forhan, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan* 32).

However, readers aware of this convention who have a cursory knowledge of ancient myth quickly realize that the author's role in the text is much more than a transcriber. In the *Epistre Othea*, Christine modifies the paternal model by using it to authorize her advising outside of the private sphere of family. Protected under the guise of a feminized version of her father, Christine explores alternate scenarios of women's worth and participation in society. This is accomplished primarily through her exploitation of female mythological figures.

Following the *Epistre Othea's* prologue is a striking mixture of dense poetry and explanatory prose. Othea's letter is broken into one hundred parts, each containing a poetic stanza followed by a prose interpretation or gloss. The poetic stanzas are Othea's predictions, while an omniscient narrator, presumably Christine, interprets Othea's poetic words in prose. These prose interpretations are not addressed to any particular individual. The form serves to distinguish the author's (Christine's) voice from Othea's.

Othea mentions many mythological figures in her poetry, from Minerva, a goddess of wisdom like herself, to heroes like Achilles. Othea's verse to Hector is vague. One brief quatrain necessitates two prose interpretations—one secular and one from a Christian viewpoint.<sup>61</sup> These readings usually explain the myth mentioned in Othea's poetry. It is clear in the prose elucidations that Othea's poetic musings have ceased. A "modern" Christian narrator who interprets divine wisdom—Othea's words—has taken the goddess's place. It is this prose gloss that makes Christine's portrayal of the sibylline Othea unique. Sibylline figures "do nothing to communicate what they know to the masses," so another voice emerges to fulfill that function (Margolis 364). By interpreting Othea's words, Christine ensures that her work will appeal to a wide audience, and as I will show, the author leaves an indelible mark on the text.

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<sup>61</sup> Occasionally, there are Christian references in the secular glosses, but for the most part the secular gloss appeals to ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Pythagorus.

In the work, Christine never directly identifies herself with Othea. Rather, she is the interpretive voice transmitting Othea's wisdom to a large audience. Granted, the prose interpretations are not in first person, but as I will explain later, Christine's innovative mythological interpretations reveal that she is the omniscient narrator. By accepting Christine as the prose narrator, the structure of the *Epistre Othea* reveals that the author had designs on advising more than just her son or one royal prince. In order for her conduct manual to succeed, she sought a large public audience.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the question of audience reveals an important difference between father's and daughter's intellectual paths. Unlike her father's intellectual advice meant only for the king, Christine targeted a larger audience for several reasons. Since she participated in a system of patronage, her livelihood depended on the reputation, as well as the accessibility, of her works.<sup>63</sup> I also interpret the *Othea*'s wide appeal as a mark of Christine's ambition. She chanced public arenas (beyond royalty) ignored by her father.

This interpretation hinges on establishing Christine as the prose narrator. An examination of the prose glosses reveal that Christine dispenses with convention and adds her own spin to mythology. Although much of the *Epistre Othea*'s content is borrowed from other sources, her innovative interpretations leave no doubt that Christine, not an ancient or university-trained source, is speaking through the prose glosses.<sup>64</sup> Christine may hold the writings of the Ancients in high esteem, yet she does not hesitate to modify their stories for her own ends.

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<sup>62</sup> She definitely succeeded in reaching a wider audience than her father. The fact that the *Epistre Othea* was not only read by princes is obvious when we consider the manuscript evidence of its popularity. There are approximately fifty known surviving copies of the *Epistre Othea*, a surprisingly large amount (Parussa 87).

<sup>63</sup> The *Epistre Othea* is one of her first works dedicated to royalty. The opening line of the text is, "Most high flower praised by the world," followed closely by the lines, "And to you, most noble and excellent prince, Duke of Orleans, Louis of great renown," (Prologue 1). The references are to Isabeau de Bavière, mother of Louis, Duc de Guyenne, and his uncle, Louis, Duc d'Orléans. The work was most likely destined for the young *dauphin*, and it was presented to his uncle Louis, Duc d'Orléans. The *Epistre Othea* is one of Pizan's earliest works presented to a patron. Not only did the *Epistre Othea* serve as her entry into patronage and publishing, this work also marked her official entry into the political writing that would characterize her later literary career.

<sup>64</sup> For a catalogue of the many sources used for the *Epistre Othea*, see Jane Chance's *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector* 141-143.



These liberal, mythical interpretations related to women will show that Christine explores different models of feminine self-expression in this text by countering the misogynist writings described at the beginning of her *Cité des dames*<sup>65</sup> and presenting women who take on masculine roles.<sup>66</sup>

Christine's differences of opinion with misogynist currents lead her to caution the young student and liberally interpret mythology for her own ends. Othea advises Hector not to believe everything he reads about women. In the passage on Pasiphae, Othea states,

Pour tant se Phasiphé fu fole,<sup>67</sup>  
Ne vueilles lire en ton escole  
Que teles soient toutes fames,  
Car il est maintes vaillans dames. (45)

For all that Pasiphae was a fool,  
Do not try to read in your school  
That all women may be like her  
For there exists many a valiant lady.

With Pasiphae, Christine makes it clear that women are not all good, nor are they all bad. Since many writings about women were negative, Christine acknowledges those depictions through her use of Pasiphae, but is sure to write women in a positive way in subsequent quatrains.

After emphasizing that not all women are bad, Othea cautions Hector not to underestimate women. Christine presents a woman warrior, Thamaris, who was underestimated by her enemy, and she easily defeated him.<sup>68</sup> She writes,

Thamaris ne desprises pas,  
Pour tant se femme est, et du pas

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<sup>65</sup> See page 58.

<sup>66</sup> She finally settles on maternal imagery, a non-threatening, but powerful place from which a woman can exercise her authority.

<sup>67</sup> "L' *O.M.* [L' *Ovide Moralisé*] est la source de Christine pour ce récit, bien que, chez notre auteur, la présentation de Pasiphaé ne soit pas aussi négative que celle que l'on trouve dans l' *Ovide médiéval*" (Parussa 419, n. a).

<sup>68</sup> "De la reine des Amazones, Thamyris, et de Cyrus, son ennemi, on parle dans l' *H.A. I* [l' *Histoire Ancienne*]" (Parussa 426, n. a). For more information on the text, l' *Histoire Ancienne*, see Parussa's edition of the *Epistre Othea* 382.

Te souviengne ou Cyrus fu pris,  
Car cher compara le depris. (57)

Do not dispraise Thamaris,  
For although she is a woman, you recall  
The passage where Cyrus was taken  
For dearly he bought the dispraise.

Christine describes Thamaris: “Thamaris fu royne d’Amasonie, moult vaillant dame pleine de grant proece, de grand hardement et sagece en armes et gouvernement.” (“Thamaris was the queen of Amazonia, a very valiant lady, full of great prowess, of great hardiness and wisdom in arms and government”) (57). Christine, in the prose gloss, explains that King Cyrus believed Thamaris, an Amazonian queen, to be a weak enemy, but this underestimation leads to his undoing. Through skillful planning, Thamaris ambushed his armies and subsequently beheaded him.<sup>69</sup>

King Cyrus’s failure to take Thamaris seriously because she was a woman led to his own demise, and Christine comments in the prose gloss:

A ce propos dit Platon: «Ne desprises nul pour sa petite faculté, car ses vertus peueuent estre grandes». . . . Thamaris, qui ne doit estre desprisee pour tant elle est femme, c’est que le bon esprit ne doit despriser ne haïr estat d’umilité . . . Et que humilité face a louer. (57)

Plato says: ‘Do not dispraise anyone for his small faculty, for his virtues may be great.’ . . . Thamaris who should not be dispraised for all that she was a woman, means that the good spirit should not dispraise her nor the state of humility . . . and that humility invites praise.

Although King Cyrus falls victim to pride, Thamaris, though his equal in arms, does not underestimate her enemy. Christine implies that a woman, though insignificant in the public sphere, can exploit traditional perceptions and succeed in the most masculine of roles, that of warrior.

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<sup>69</sup> In the *Cité des Dames*, Christine dedicates a section of her first book to Thamaris and gives the details of her defeat of King Cyrus.

Thamaris is portrayed as a great military strategist, while another of the quatrains is dedicated to Io, whose connection to intellectual endeavors was well-established by the fifteenth century. With Io, Christine not only liberally interprets the myth but adapts Io's story to her own ends. Othea remarks:

Moult te delittes ou savoir  
Yo, plus qu'en nulle autre avoir,  
Car par ce pourras moult apprendre  
Et du bien largement y prendre (29)

Delight yourself greatly in the knowledge of  
Io, who has more than any other,  
For through it you may apprehend much  
And of the good in it take largely.

According to Christine, Io, who invented the alphabet, was turned into a cow and then into a common woman because of an affair with Jupiter.<sup>70</sup> Christine asserts, “. . . les poetes ayent mucié verité soubs couverture de fable,” (“the poets have hidden truth under fable,”) to alert the reader that she will make an innovative interpretation of Io's story (29).<sup>71</sup> Christine claims, “Elle devint vache, car si comme la vache donne laict, le quel est doux et nourrissant, elle donna par les lettres que elle trouva doulce nourriture a l'entendement” (“She became a cow, for just as the cow gives milk, . . . she gave, through the letters she invented, sweet nourishment to the

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<sup>70</sup> She recounts Io's story more or less faithfully in her address of Mercury and Argus in section thirty of the *Epistre Othea*. “Io apparaît dans l'*O.M.* [*l'Ovide Moralisé*]. L'invention de l'alphabet lui est pourtant attribué dans [plusieurs textes] . . . L'interprétation de la transformation de Io en vache et en *femme commune* est sans doute le fruit de l'invention de Christine de Pizan. L'auteur montre ici comment on peut récupérer un mythe de l'antiquité en le forçant dans un cadre interprétatif selon lequel toute fiction doit avoir un sens second. Io deviendra par la suite une héroïne de cette galerie de femmes savantes et/ou vertueuses qui fera l'objet de la *Cité des dames*” (Parussa 408-409).

<sup>71</sup> According to Edith Hamilton's synthesis of Aeschylus's and Ovid's versions of Io's story, Zeus (Christine uses the Greek name, Jupiter) fell in love with Io. “Zeus's jealous wife, Hera, was the direct cause of her misfortunes, but back of them all was Zeus himself. . . . Greater than Zeus's love was his fear of Hera's jealousy. He acted, however, with very little wisdom for the Father of Gods and Men when he tried to hide Io and himself by wrapping the earth in a cloud so thick and dark that a sudden night seemed to drive the clear daylight away. Hera . . . suspected her husband, . . . [and] glided swiftly down to the earth. But Zeus had been quick. As she caught sight of him he was standing beside a most lovely white heifer—Io, of course. [Hera tormented Io mercilessly until she reached the Nile and finally bore Zeus's son Epaphus, the ancestor of Hercules]” (Hamilton 95-99).

understanding.”) (29).<sup>72</sup> Maternal imagery dominates, and in this instance, women’s cultural production—Io’s letters—is naturalized.

In order to clarify my use of the term, “naturalized,” I will examine the source of Othea’s and Io’s authority. The *Epistre Othea*’s two prologues establish Othea as a female double of Christine’s father. Therefore, Othea’s link to paternal authority works in conjunction with her status as goddess to allow her to advise one royal prince using her poetry. Othea is the dominant female presence in this story, and Io is simply one of the goddess’s one hundred lessons. Despite her inferior narrative position, Io is unique. Io’s access to knowledge is linked to maternal imagery. For Christine, Io’s intellectual endeavors are linked directly to mother’s milk—a natural, bodily fluid. Milk, in this case, is a metaphor for ink, the liquid of writing/cultural production. Through her written “letters,” Io is admitted to intellectual space. Io even surpasses Othea as an effective teacher/adviser, for she shares her milk/ink with everyone, not just one royal personage.

Christine emphasizes Io’s importance as a woman intellectual teaching all men and women. The author continues, “Ce que elle fu femme commune peut estre entendu que son sens fu commun a tous, comme lettres soient communes a toutes gens” (“That she [Io] became a common woman can be understood in that her *sens* was common to all, as letters are common to all people”) (29). Christine further interprets that Io is actually someone “. . . qui peut estre entendu pour letres et escriptures et les histoires des bons” (“. . . [to be] understood as letters, and writings and histories of good folk”) (29). In the end, Io *is* “good” writing. Mother’s milk has found the page, and for an instant, Christine’s writing is based on maternal authority. Although

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<sup>72</sup> In “Christine’s Minerva, the Mother Valorized,” Jane Chance analyzes the over-arching concept of the mother in the *Epistre Othea*. My focus here is Io’s status as a maternal intellectual, Io, whereas she is used in Chance’s study to illustrate that “The figure of the mother is most important for Christine . . . because of her lactational ability and what that signifies *morally* . . . faith is feminine . . .” (128-129).

Io is only one character among many in the *Epistre Othea*, her presence gestures towards the importance of the maternal, not the paternal, in Christine's later writings. In this isolated case, Christine's positive interpretation of Io's story frames knowledge and teaching in a maternal cadre, as Christine authorizes her own cultural production in a naturalized, socially acceptable manner.

In the prose interpretation of Io, Christine even comments on her own path of study. In the author's prose gloss concerning Io, she writes,

«Qui s'efforce d'aquerir science et bonnes meurs, il treuve ce qui lui plaist en ce monde et en l'autre». (29)

Whoever [tries very hard]<sup>73</sup> to acquire knowledge and good conditions, he will find that which pleases him in this world and in the other [world].

Christine's self-education was no easy task, yet she persevered. As the quote indicates, her own efforts to acquire knowledge, her auto-didacticism, allowed her to find "that which pleases *her*." In an interesting twist, this self-education might also be what allowed Christine's innovative interpretations of mythological figures like Io. Jane Chance comments: "Thus, the advantage to Christine's lack of schooling . . . is her fresh and innovative approach to mythographic conventions. In her *Letter of Othea* . . . her innovations result in what might be termed a gynocentric mythography" (Chance 25). The author legitimizes her position as scholar by using a woman, Io, to express that women have the ability to learn and teach, even though their ideas or methods may not conform to society's norms.

Among other non-traditional images, Christine offers a feminized astrologer/royal adviser/teacher in Othea, a woman warrior in Thamaris, and a woman scholar in Io. Christine ends her work as she began it with a prophetic figure, the Cumaean sibyl. In the *Othea's*

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<sup>73</sup>Chance translates this as "forces himself."

hundredth and last section, “Caesar Augustus and the Sibyl,” Othea concludes her advice to Hector:

Cent auctoritez t’ay esriptes,  
Si ne soient de toy despites  
Car Augustus de femme apprist  
Qui d’estre aouré le reprist. (100)

I wrote one hundred authorities to you;  
May you not despise them  
For Augustus learned from a woman,  
Who reprimanded him for being worshipped.<sup>74</sup>

The last figure Othea presents mirrors the goddess, and through this reflection, is another feminized version of Christine’s astrologer father. However, the Cumaean sibyl would surpass Othea in a fifteenth-century reader’s eyes. The sibyl, a woman, cures Caesar of his pride and converts him to Christianity. The sibyl advises more than a mere prince; she actually advises a great leader in the name of the noblest cause.<sup>75</sup> By ending her text with the sibyl, another feminized prophetic paternal vision, Christine frames her text within her father’s authority. She challenges it, yet by opening and closing with prophetic figures remains within its limits. Nevertheless, she takes advantage of her position to make a case for women’s involvement in public life.

In another of her innovative interpretations, Christine writes in the prose gloss, “«Ne te soit point honte de oïr verité et bon enseignement, qui que le die, car verité anoblist cellui qui le prononce»” (“ ‘Do not be ashamed to hear truth and good teaching, whoever may say it; for truth ennobles whoever pronounces it’ ”) (100). She emphasizes that “bonne parole et bon

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<sup>74</sup> This translation is from Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Kevin Brownlee’s *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan* 40.

<sup>75</sup> Christine emphasizes that not only can women advise men, but also they lead them to divine truth. Essentially, Christine has gone from the “unworthy woman” of her prologue to arbiter of divine wisdom through her sibylline characters in the *Epistre Othea*.

enseignement font a louer de quelconques personne que ilz soient dis” (“good words and good teachings bring praise to whichever persons have said them”) (100). Her emphasis is not on the religious significance of the sibyl’s revelation to Caesar. Instead, Christine focuses on the sibyl herself. In conjunction with Othea’s poetry, this prose interpretation makes it clear that Christine’s concern in the last section of the *Epistre Othea* is less the education of Hector and more a woman’s authority to advise.<sup>76</sup> The Cumaean sibyl’s status as a bridge between the Ancients and Christian thought reflects Christine’s role as the “Christian” interpreter of a pagan goddess’s divine wisdom. Viewed thus, the feminine specificity of the sibyl parallels Christine’s voice, as the author speaks on behalf of her own right to advise others.

In this case, Christine follows her father’s model, for she does not know any other way to authorize her engagement of the public sphere. However, by framing her text with two female characters, Othea and the sibyl, who teach men *and* valorizing women’s words through a prose interpretation of her own, Christine emphasizes that women are worthy to advise. The *Epistre Othea*’s conclusion sets the stage for Christine’s future career filled with first person narratives. In later texts, the author would not stand behind her characters who advise men, but interact openly with her characters. In order to reach that goal, Christine had to abandon her reliance on paternal authority and learn how to speak confidently as a woman in the public sphere. As long as she relied on the paternal model, something of herself was missing from her early instructive texts for men, the *Enseignemens moraux* and the *Epistre Othea*. However, as I will show, Christine found that part of herself in her writings for and about women and eventually spoke confidently as a woman, even in her texts aimed at a male audience.

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<sup>76</sup> Roberta Krueger, in “Christine’s Anxious Lessons,” writes, “By ending Othea’s epistle with a woman’s prophetic voice, Christine highlights the sibylline teacher who will be a major force in her works and valorizes her own teaching” (20).

## Christine and the *Querelle des femmes*

Beginning with her son, she chose male subjects to receive her wisdom, and reinforced society's dictate that only men were worthy of scholarly instruction. She adopted the father's role of educating a son and a royal prince.<sup>77</sup> Christine must have realized that teaching women presented even more difficulty than teaching men, for this had no precedent in French society.

Finding no female Parisian role models, Christine reinforced the structures that kept her from learning in the first place by reenacting masculine instructional roles—in her *Enseignemens* by encouraging the intellectual development of boys and the traditional instruction of girls and in her *Epistre Othea* by modeling her spokeswoman on her father.<sup>78</sup> Despite flashes of discontent with her father's models, the author does not manage to effectively surpass them in her early instructive texts. She works within their bounds to authorize herself to speak. Christine was aware of the structures/ideas that limited women through her personal experience as a daughter, wife, mother, and widow. She began to engage those structures/ideas with her favorable representations of women in the *Epistre Othea*, yet she kept her criticism to a minimum. The *Epistre Othea*'s veiled address of woman's right and ability to engage the public/cultural sphere pales in comparison to her later works written about and/or for women. Her experiences as a widow and involvement in a literary debate, the *Débat de la Rose* (c. 1402), part of the on-going *Querelle des femmes*, led Christine to seriously question and criticize social structures designed to exclude women.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Christine never mentions her own daughter's education.

<sup>78</sup> The most literate contemporary woman apart from herself that is mentioned in her literature is her patron's (the Duke of Orleans) wife, Valentina Visconti, originally from Italy, like Christine. As I will show, Visconti is an important figure in *Le livre du corps de policie*.

<sup>79</sup> Christine participated in *Le Débat de la Rose*, a continuation of the *querelle des femmes*. "The *querelle des femmes* refers to a series of written documents on the equality of the sexes, particularly on the condition and supposed character of women, dating from the late fourteenth century through the seventeenth century. Although mainly French, this written debate engages writers throughout Europe and originates in ancient times. Many



As mentioned earlier, Christine's educational experience followed Parisian dictates despite her father and husband's humanist connections. Reality conformed to the Parisian system. Her sheltered, socially appropriate upbringing left her with no tools to navigate the public world alone. In her texts, Christine acknowledges that widows like herself, without great fortune, were at a social disadvantage, and the autonomy granted by widowhood translated to little or no power in public life.<sup>80</sup> In most cases, women's authority derived from the men they stood behind.

Christine gives a striking example in the written autobiographical reflections of her *Advision*. She recollects her reception as a child when her father joined Charles V's court. In the *Advision*, she is honored for being Thomas de Pizan's daughter:

Ou chastel du Louvre a Paris ou moys de decembre estoit ledit roy, lors que la presentacion dudit mainage a belle et honnourable compaignie de parens fu a ses yeulx manifeste, laquelle femme et famille a tres grant joie et grans offres les receipt. (III.III)

It was in the palace of the Louvre in Paris in the month of December that the presentation of this household with the fair and honorable company of relatives was made before his eyes; and the said King received the wife and family with great joy and many presents.

However, when she contrasts this scene with her reception at court after she became a widow, it is clear that without her father, or a respected male figure beside her, Christine is powerless. She first explains the reason she leaves her home to fight her own battles in the *Advision*: "La cause qui me mouvoit a en personne oultre mon gré faire tel poursuite estoit que, quan mon messaige y envoioie, n'avoit en leur presence nulle audience." ("The reason I was moved against my wishes

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Classical and late antique writers are cited during the *querelle* as justification for what we would consider to be misogyny" (Dropick 329).

<sup>80</sup> Wealth and royal ties did grant some widows more power in public life. Fairchild's comments on the relative position of the rich and poor widow: "In most legal systems, widows gained the ability to act for themselves at law; . . . they were frequently named guardians of their children. They also regained control of their property and often inherited substantial holdings from their husbands. Thus widows were often the wealthiest women in their communities. And they now had control of their lives and made their own decisions. Yet, . . . there was another side to widowhood. With autonomy came . . . responsibilities. And, of course, not all widows had property; those of the lower classes often inherited nothing but debts" (104).

to pursue the case in person was that when I sent my messenger there, they did not grant him an audience”) (III.VI). As the widowed woman’s servant, her messenger does not even merit notice. Christine relates in the *Advisioun* that, as the widow, she received even worse treatment:

Or pues savoir que a moy, . . . faire de necessité vertu m’estoir labour, qui a dongier et coust de compaignie, selon l’estat apris, me convenoit troter après eulx selon le stille, puis en leurs cours ou sales en commun muser atout ma boiste et mandement le plus des jours sans y rien faire . . . Mais longue estoit l’attente. O Dieux! quantes parolles anuieuses, quans regars nyces, que de rigolages de aucuns . . . souvent y ouoie. . . (III.VI)

I had to run after them according to my procedure, then sit and wait in their courts or antechambers with my file and summons, most days without accomplishing anything . . . but the wait was long. God, what tedious speeches, what silly looks, what jokes I often heard there from certain people. . . .<sup>81</sup>

With no male protector, those at court easily dismiss Christine. The author’s discontent with her treatment is clear, as she acknowledges that women like her have no power in the public sphere.

This commentary may have had its roots in Christine’s involvement in the *Débat de la rose*. Her participation in this Parisian literary debate is catalogued as one of her many “firsts” for French women. The debate centered around Guillaume de Lorris’s and Jean de Meun’s popular work, *Le roman de la rose*. Christine sided with Parisian university affiliates like Jean Gerson who believed the text was a threat to common decency, while the other camp of university aficionados vehemently defended what they termed a masterpiece of allegorical fiction. Christine and Gerson sided against other *universitaires* like Jean de Montreuil and the Col brothers.<sup>82</sup>

The denouement of the debate was grim. Christine’s ally, Gerson, though highly respected, was rejected by the majority of the *universitaires* due to his denunciation of Jean de

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<sup>81</sup> It is clear that her advice to Jean in the *Enseignemens* about court cases definitely cautioned him about a world she had personally experienced.

<sup>82</sup> For more information on Christine’s relationship with Jean Gerson, see Earl Jeffery Richards’ article “Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson: An Intellectual Friendship” in *Christine de Pizan 2000* edited by Adrian Armstrong. For an account of Christine’s correspondence with Jean de Montreuil and the Col brothers, see Regine Pernoud’s discussion in her biography of Pizan, 108-135 or *Le Débat sur Le Roman de la Rose* by Eric Hicks, 1977.

Meun's work.<sup>83</sup> As for Christine, Gontier Col became so frustrated with her that he referred to her using the informal "tu," and she returned his attack in kind, using "tu" and horrifying the lot of *universitaires* in his camp.<sup>84</sup> Despite the abuse she received, the *Débat de la rose* was Christine's first direct engagement in contemporary thought. Merely by her presence as a woman standing her ground in this public debate, Christine questioned the gendered boundaries of early fifteenth-century social structure.

Why were certain arenas forbidden to women? Why could she not join a literary quarrel? Why dismiss her opinions due to her sex? What made her voice so different, when she obviously echoed the feelings of the respected Jean Gerson? Christine did not devote herself entirely to the exploration of these questions in her writing until 1405 in her *Livre de la cité des dames*. This work has been examined by countless critics, feminist and non-feminist alike, and many have tried to eke out every reference that can be termed "feminist," while others have spent pages countering these views. What I believe is lost in these detailed (re)readings is the importance of Christine's pose as student, not the adviser/teacher.

Christine is in dire need of help as she despairs about being a woman in the *Cité des dames*,

Mais la veue d'icelluy dit livre, tout soit il de nulle autorité, ot engendré en moy nouvelle penssee qui fist naistre en mon couraige grant admiracion, penssant quelle puet estre la cause, ne dont ce puet venir, que tant de divers hommes, clerks et autres, on esté, et sont, sy enclins a dire de bouche et en leur traittiez et escripts tant de diableries et de vituperes de femmes et de leurs condicions . . . mais generaument aucques en tous trittiez philosophes, pouettes, tous orateurs desquelz les noms seroit longue chose, semble que tous parlent par une meismes bouche et tous accorent une semblable conclusion, determinant les meurs femenins enclins et plains de tous les vices . . . Ceste seulle rayson brief et court me faisoit conclurre que . . . vraiment, toutevoye, couvenoit il que ainsi fust. . . Adonc mon estant en ceste penssee, me sourdi une grant desplaisance et

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<sup>83</sup> See Pernoud 128.

<sup>84</sup> See Pernoud 119-120.

tristesce de couraige en desprisant moy meismes et tout le sexe feminin, si come ce ce fust monstre en nature. (*Cité des dames* 617-620)

Yet, having looked at this book [Matheolus's *Lamentations*], which I considered to be of no authority, an extraordinary thought became planted in my mind which made me wonder why on earth it was that so many men, both clerks and others, have said and continue to say and write such awful, damning things about women and their ways. . . . It is all manner of philosophers, poets and orators too numerous to mention, who all seem to speak with one voice and are unanimous in their view that female nature is wholly given up to vice. . . . It was on the basis of this one simple argument that I was forced to conclude that . . . these men had to be in the right. . . . This thought inspired such great sense of disgust and sadness in me that I began to despise myself and the whole of my sex as an aberration in nature. (*City of Ladies* 5-6)

Christine's female teachers, the allegorical figures of Raison (Reason), Droiture (Rectitude), and Justice, then appear to her. Reason states,

Chiere fille, . . . Si est mon office de radrecier les hommes et les femmes quant ilz sont desvoyés et de les remettre en droite voye . . . en demonstrant leur erreut et ce quoy ils faillent, . . . puis je leur enseigne la ma/niere de suivre ce qui est a ffaire et comment fuyeront ce qui est a lasissier. (*Cité des dames* 627)

My dear daughter, . . . My task is to bring back men and women when they drift away from the straight and narrow . . . instructing them in the error of their ways. . . . Then I teach them to follow the correct road and to avoid doing what is undesirable. (*City of Ladies* 10)

In turn, each of the other women enumerates what they will teach Christine. In the narrative space, the author cedes the role of teacher to her three female allegorical characters. Why would Christine forgo a role, that of teacher/adviser, she so prized in the *Enseignemens* and the prose glosses of the *Epistre Othea*, when her audience was modified to include women as well? <sup>85</sup>

It is no accident that in her early works instructing men Christine takes the position of teacher, whereas in *Cité des dames*, Christine opts to be the student of other wise women. I

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<sup>85</sup> Christine's works like *Cité des dames* indicate that she aspired to advise more than just royalty or men. She did not want to simply abide by and reinforce social dictates on women's education. Christine wanted to teach women something new. However, when Christine finally writes a work focusing on women, she no longer portrays herself a teacher, but a student. It would seem that she has learned how to teach men, but she, as a woman who has adopted men's roles, must learn how to meaningfully teach women.

believe Christine wanted to empower women to defend themselves by modeling the role of student in *Cité des dames*. Reason states,

. . . sy saishes que, pour forclorre du / monde la semblable erreur ou tu estoyes encheute et que les dames et toutes vaillans femmes puissent d'ores en avant avoir aucun retrait et closture de deffence contre tant de divers assaillans. . . . par quoy n'est pas merueille se leurs envieux annemis et l'outraige des villains, qui par divers dars les ont assaillies, ont eu contre elles vittoire de leur guerre par faulte de deffence. (*Cité des dames* 629)

Our wish is to prevent others from falling into the same error as you and to ensure that, in future, all worthy ladies and valiant women are protected from those who attacked them. . . It's no wonder that women have been the losers in this war against them since the envious slanderers and vicious traitors who criticize them have been allowed to aim all manner of weapons at their defenseless targets. (*City of Ladies* 11)

Defenseless women make easy targets, but learned women like Christine have a chance to counter the many misogynist treatises of the past.<sup>86</sup> She even makes a veiled call to educated women to take a stand against what is written about them. Christine states,

Sy me merveil trop comment tant de vaillans dames qui ont esté et de si saiges et de si lettrees et qui le bel stille ont eu de dictier et faire biaux livres ont souffert si longuement sans contredire tant de horreurs estre tesmoingnees contre elles par divers hommes quant bien savoyet que a grant tort estoit. (*Cité des dames* 924)

I'm therefore amazed that so many worthy women, especially those who were learned and educated enough to write fine books in elegant style, could have allowed men to come out with their slanders all this time without contradicting them, when they knew only too well how false these men's accusations were. (*City of Ladies* 169)

After learning through study that she has worth as a woman in the *Cité des dames*, Christine reframes what she knows of the world from a feminine perspective.<sup>87</sup> The next phase of instruction, the *Livre des trois vertus*, was aimed at women alone.

It is a handbook for women in society—not in the idealized society of the city but in the dangerous courts, cities, and countryside of Christine's own time. In its pragmatic and

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<sup>86</sup> Her catalogue of illustrious women ideally functioned to challenge preconceived notions about women through the valorization of past examples. *Cité des dames* countered the catalogues of infamous women by writers like Matheolus.

<sup>87</sup> She spent so much time establishing her authority as teacher of men that she neglected to use her scholarly pursuits to help women through their travails.

sometimes brutal approach to survival in society it is also quite different from other books offering advice to women, such as *Le Ménagier de Paris* [*The Paris Householder*], a guide to married life and housekeeping written by an elderly husband for his young wife in late fourteenth-century Paris. (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 156)

Christine's difficult experiences as wife, mother, widow, and writer could offer much to women.

The author is again the student of Reason, Rectitude and Justice in the *Livre des trois vertus*.

She did not invent this genre, but she modified it to include all levels of society.<sup>88</sup> This follow-up work to the *Cité des dames* did not stop at instructing one person (like her father and his feminized representations, Othea and the sibyl); Christine advised the princess, the noblewoman and the peasant and prostitute as well. Reviewing her own life experiences through the feminine rubric of her three allegorical female characters affords the author the opportunity to re-envision her own existence as a woman.

Christine synthesizes her participation in the *Rose* debate, her *Cité des dames*, and the subsequent *Livre des trois vertus* into a new method of authorizing her participation in the public sphere in the *Advision*. By posing as a student to maternal figures in the *Cité des dames* and *Livre des trois vertus*, Christine explores a new theory of women's participation in public life that offers an alternative to the paternal model she has reinforced (willingly or not) up to this point. Instead of imitating her father to authorize her unorthodox activities, Christine shifts her focus to her own intellectual merits and returns to the idea of the maternal intellectual, first expressed in her early instructive texts for men. I will term Christine's new focus, as developed in her *Advision*, the maternal model.

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<sup>88</sup> Roberta Krueger asserts that there were "other works of female conduct such as the *Livre pour l'enseignement des filles* of the Chevalier de la Tour Landry and the *Ménagier de Paris*. . . . [The *Epistre Othea*'s] autoreferentiality and its detailed, realistic portrayal of women's lives in the various social classes combine to make this work one of Christine's most personal and original compositions. . ." (28).

## Christine's Maternal Model

It is important to emphasize that this maternal model is not simply Christine's mimicry of her own mother who embodies the patriarchal construct of motherhood. Her mother's traditional ideas are clearly enumerated by Christine in the *Cité des dames*.<sup>89</sup> Christine's maternal model is fundamentally changed by her experiences outside the traditional sphere. Christine and her characters are the mother-intellectuals who suggest a new model in her two early instructive texts for men, the *Enseignemens* and the *Epistre Othea*. In the *Enseignemens*, she is the mother-intellectual encouraging her son to study. However, Christine authorizes her right to speak through acting as a father-substitute and privileges the paternal model of education. Secondly, Io in the *Epistre Othea* intimately connects mother imagery and "letters." However, the overarching presence of the prophetic figure Othea frames this reference within the scope of her father's intellectual legacy.<sup>90</sup> Christine distills the tenets of this powerful maternal model in her *Advision*.

In the third part of the *Advision*, Christine writes autobiographically. Her father and mother are in the text, as well as a detailed rendition of her young life, subsequent trauma, therapeutic self-education, and finally, her writing career. Putting the lessons of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice to work, Christine squarely places her authority to speak on a subversive use of socially acceptable feminine behavior. The importance of this switch in authority is that Christine, ideologically at least, is released from the dictates of the paternal model. She counters the belief that men are guardians of the intellect and its public manifestations, while women are the arbiters of hearth and home. She wisely maintains a socially acceptable stance instead of

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<sup>89</sup> See page 28.

<sup>90</sup> I will not attempt to enumerate the references in *Cité des dames* and *Trois vertus*. These are catalogues of women, so mothers are everywhere. Their significance is lost amidst all the other laudatory "feminist" content.

demanding radical social changes that were impossible. Instead she allies cultural production, specifically writing, with maternal metaphors to legitimize her unorthodox choice of profession. In the *Advision*, Christine revisits and develops the maternal intellectual touched upon by her use of Io in the *Epistre Othea*.

In the *Advision*, Christine's presentation of socially acceptable images subsume her cultural production into a traditional scheme, while subversively undermining the paternal model she emulated in the *Enseignemens* and the *Epistre Othea*. In retrospect, Christine makes it clear that the duties of married life eclipsed her intellectual leanings.

Car, non obstant que naturellement et de nativité y fusse encline, me tolloit y vaquier l'occupacion des affaires que ont communement le mariees et aussi la charge de souvent parter enfans. (*Advision Christine* III.8)<sup>91</sup>

For although I was naturally inclined to scholarship from birth, my frequent child-bearing had deprived me of it[study] to employ me there[child-bearing]. (*Christine's Vision* III.8)

In portraying herself this way, Christine assumes a feminine stance proper to the dictates of fifteenth-century French society. She appropriately denied her own gifts in order to apply herself fully to her children.

When Christine does turn to scholarly pursuits, it is as a solace from her travails in the public world—trials largely due to financial difficulties and her own status as widowed woman. She depicts her pursuit of knowledge as a private affair that occurs behind closed doors:

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<sup>91</sup> The details of Christine's early education are vague. She gives indications that she studied rudimentary Latin and that she was literate before marriage. This is a problem for many studies on medieval women's education. According to Ferrante, "... we must piece together allusions in letters and lives and romances with passages from monastic rules, and supplement them with the writings of the women whose work is extant, in order to deduce what they must have been taught and where. Like boys, most girls acquired their education in monastic schools, but some were tutored at home, particularly in royal courts. (9) In many instances, a woman's education did not go beyond reading the *Psalter* and signing her name, but even at that it was more than most laymen could do" ("The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy" 9-10). Fortunately, Christine's account of the second stage of her education that occurred after her father's death is fairly detailed and of primary importance to this study.



Adonc cloy mes portes, c'est assavoir mes sens, que plus ne fussent tant vagues aux choses foraines, et vous happay ces beaulx livres et volumes et dis que aucune chose recouvreroie de mes pertes passees (*Advision Christine* III.X)

I closed my doors, or my senses, which no longer strayed to external matters, and snapped up those beautiful books and volumes from you [Fortune], saying I would recover one thing from my past losses. (*Christine's Vision* III.X)

Christine is careful to represent her learning as completely different from that of the *universitaires*. She is no professional, simply a woman who enjoys reading when she can find the time.

She does not even claim to have the capacity to master her father's *sciences* on her own, but rather focuses the other end of the spectrum, that of history and literature:

Ne me pris pas comme presumptueuse aux parfondescs des sciences obscures es termes que ne sceusse comprendre : . . . Ains, comme l'enfant que au premier on met a l'a.b.c., me pris aux histoires anciennes des commencements du monde. . .après aux deductions des sciences selon ce qu'en l'espace du temps que je estudiay en pos comprendre. (*Advision Christine* III.X)

I did not arrogantly take myself into the depths of the obscure sciences, to subjects I could not comprehend. . . . Rather, like the child one first puts to his ABC's, I went to the ancient histories from the beginning of the world—. . . thereafter to the deductions of the sciences, according to what I could understand in the time I had studied them. (*Christine's Vision* III.X)

Although Christine's lack of education prevents her from profoundly studying the *sciences*, she is able to benefit from her study of ancient history. She contrasts herself with her father whose *science* of astrology, and the future, served as the basis for his advice to the king. Christine's advice is based in the microcosm of her own past experience and framed within the macrocosm of world history.

Although history may form the foundation of her advice, she discovers a conduit to spread her teachings in another area:

Puis me pris aux livres de pouetes, et | comme de plus en plus alast croissant le bien de  
ma congnoissance, adonc fus je aise quant j'oz trouvé le stille a moy naturel. . . .  
(*Advision Christine* III.X)

Then I went to the books of the poets, and as they continued to increase the good of my  
understanding, I was content inasmuch as I had found the style natural to me. . . .  
(*Christine's Vision* III.X)

Christine finds herself in the study of literature.<sup>92</sup> Having learned so much from her experience,  
both autodidactic and in the public world, Christine set out to give advice to others in the form of  
literature. She discovered the area in which she could realize this ambition, yet writing books  
and securing patrons meant a violation of masculine public space by a woman—a taboo made  
painfully clear by the *Débat de la rose*.<sup>93</sup> The paternal model limited the scope of her writings.  
Therefore, Christine needed a way to explore controversial issues raised by her works for women  
while remaining allied with traditional feminine behavior. As I have shown, the first step to this  
end was to ensure that she portrayed herself as fulfilling traditional feminine duties as a daughter,  
wife, and mother. The second step was to ally those duties with her writing.

In a second feature of Christine's maternal model, Christine's textual production and the  
works themselves are inextricably bound to maternal metaphors. In the *Advision*, Nature  
addresses Christine and says,

...comme la femme qui a enfanté, si tost que elle ot le cry de son enfant oublie son mal,  
oublieras le travail du labour oyant la voix de tes volumes. (*Advision Christine* III.X)

Just as the woman who has given birth to a child forgets her pain as soon as she hears the  
cry of the infant, so you will forget the pain of labor in hearing the voice of your books.  
(*Christine's Vision* III.X)

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<sup>92</sup> Materials that approximate Christine's learning emerge from her writing in two ways. Christine describes her education in several of her works, and her erudition speaks for itself. For a list of texts Christine most likely studied, see note 33, page 148-149 in Glenda K. McLeod's translation of *Christine's Vision*.

<sup>93</sup> This general, broad education is nothing like the measured education of university scholars, although her lack of formal education might not have been detrimental if we accept the earlier cited comments by Chance on Christine's *Epistre Othea* to be true (see page 51). According to Chance, her private study led to her unique writing.

Obviously this pursuit must not have been easy for her, as she compares the preparation for writing books to the pain of childbirth. I believe Christine had another reason for including this metaphor. The author developed many strategies in her writing to render her texts more socially acceptable. Her use of Nature works to legitimize the author's claim to writing while disarming her misogynist readers who would argue that a woman should engage the intellectual sphere. Christine conflates natural and cultural production by comparing childbirth, an exhausting process over which women have little control, to the creation of books, traditionally a man's task. This metaphor allows Christine to enter into forbidden territory in an acceptable way. By naturalizing her production of books, Christine promotes her own writing as acceptable feminine behavior.

However, Christine uses the popular medieval metaphor of striking the anvil earlier in this same section of the *Advison*. This metaphor is very different from Christine's childbirth image. Jean de Meun had used the hammer to represent male genitalia and the anvil to represent female genitalia in the *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>94</sup> Christine states, "Adont me dist : «Prens les outilz et fier sur l'enclume»" ("She [Nature] told me, 'Take the tools and strike the anvil'") (III.10). The masculine imagery of the tools, the writing instrument in this case, would not be lost on any reader familiar with the *Roman de la rose*. Christine, through Nature's commands, transforms the sexual metaphor—that of the hammer and anvil—of the *Roman de la rose* into a metaphor

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<sup>94</sup> In his sermon, the allegorical character Genius says, "It was an evil day for Nature when she gave stylus and tablets to those false folk of whom I have spoken, and hammer and anvils according to her laws and customs, and sharp-pointed plowshares fit for her ploughs, and fallow fields, not stony ones but fertile and grassy, which need tilling and digging if they are to be enjoyed. The false ones will not till them in order to serve and honour Nature; instead they wish to destroy her by fleeing the anvils, tablets, and fallow fields that she has made so rich and dear, so that things might be continued and Death prevented from killing them" (*Romance of the Rose* 301). Armand Strubel comments in his edition of *Le roman de la rose*, "Les métaphores de la procréation sont héritées d'Alain de Lille : les trois images utilisées – l'écriture, le labour et le travail de forgeron – renvoient aux activités créatrices de l'homme, artistiques, . . . agricoles ou artisanales : le registre du labour est le plus sollicité . . ." (1121).

for writing. It appears that Nature gives Christine an unconventional command to engage in cultural production—writing—under a masculine rubric—the tools and anvil.

However, this is not the case. Christine must use the tools and strike the anvil, for these are *Nature*'s tools. Nature is a blacksmith of sorts, and her job is to create bodies. Christine describes her interaction with Nature<sup>95</sup> earlier in the *Advision*,

. . . mon esperit prent, si le fiche ens, et tout en la maiere que aux corps humains donner fourme accoustumé avoit, tout mela ensemble et ainsi cuire me laissa par quantité de temps tant que ung petit corps humain me fut parfaict. Mais comme le voulist ainsi celle qui la destrempe avoit faicte, a laquel cause se tient et non au mole, j'aportay sexe femmenin. (I.III)

. . . she took my spirit and exactly as she was accustomed to do to give human bodies form, mixed it all together and left me to cook for a certain period of time until a small human shape was made for me. I was given the feminine sex, however, because she who had cast it wished it to be so rather than because of the mold.

Nature's task is to create human beings, like women bear children. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski comments, "Just like Nature forges new human beings on her anvil (in the *Roman de la Rose*, for example), Christine is charged to forge new works" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski). As with the *Epistre Othea*'s Io, Christine's cultural production is naturalized. The masculine imagery, though present, is secondary to the auspices of Nature's creation of "children." The author's particular use of the childbirth metaphor further disarms her readers. Blumenfeld-Kosinski comments, "Christine by using childbirth as a metaphor for writing reverses Alain de Lille [and Jean de Meun], who had used writing as a metaphor for sex" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski).<sup>96</sup> In the *Roman de la Rose*, Jean de Meun used both writing (the stylus and the page) and the hammer and the anvil to represent sex. Although Nature's involvement feminizes the "tools and anvil" metaphor,

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<sup>95</sup> See *Christine's Vision* 44, n. 7.

<sup>96</sup> In presenting Nature as the arbiter of intellectual endeavors, Christine favors Alain de Lille's rendition of Nature in his *Plaint of Nature*. John Fleming comments, "Alain's Natura, though wounded, represents a force working in conjunction with Reason ; human rationality seems to be within her gift. In the context of the *Roman [de la rose]*, on the other hand, Nature is a force kept carefully distinct from Reason, and she speaks of man's rationality as a divine gift outside her capabilities" (195-196).

Christine still needed to offer an alternative to the image of writing as sex—a metaphor in which the writing instrument represented the male genitalia. Christine had no claim to the pen under this rubric, so the childbirth metaphor offers the author, a woman, the ability to create texts.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, the passive images of childbirth overshadow the active image of the tool/anvil metaphor. Nature authorizes Christine to write, but by passive, hence socially acceptable, means.

Christine seals this association by relating it to a concrete personal experience. Christine had great success as a writer. Her popularity spread beyond France, and she took advantage of her renown by placing her son with the English Earl of Salisbury. However popular she became, Christine recognized that she had to promote herself as a writer in a proper feminine way. While she proudly describes how her reputation ensured her son's safety, she is careful to cultivate the writing metaphor created by Nature for women. In the *Advison*, Christine explains how she sent her son to England to be the Earl of Salisbury's son's companion, and how Richard II was beheaded and replaced by Henry IV.<sup>98</sup> The Earl of Salisbury, loyal to his King, "was killed in January 1400" (Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 165). Henry IV, impressed by Christine's works, brought Jean to his court. The only way Christine could secure her son's return was to use her literary reputation, and literally her works, to trick the King into allowing Jean to come back to France. She writes,

Et a brief parler, tant fis a grant peine et par le moien de mes livres que congié ot mon dit filz de me venir querir par de ça pour mener la, qui encore n'y vois. (*Advison Christine* III.IX)

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<sup>97</sup> "Reversing the old topos of writing as plowing, sowing, etc (i.e. phallic terms), Christine reveals that nature wanted her to give birth to 'nouvelles lectures' (new books)" (Blumenfeld-Kosinski).

<sup>98</sup> The Earl of Salisbury was a loyal friend of King Richard II.

To be brief, I did so many things—not without great forfeit, it cost me several of my manuscripts—that I obtained leave for my son to come and fetch me to lead me there, [a place] I still have not seen. (*Christine's Vision* III.IX)

In this passage, Christine is once again conflating natural and cultural production in order to assume the proper feminine role. She exchanged her works for her son, and she grieves their loss as she would grieve the loss of her child. Her feminized cultural production serves as a medium of exchange, not for ideas in this case, but for her own child. In this economy, Christine's books are on equal footing with her son. This equivalence reaffirms Nature's childbirth metaphor by conflating cultural and natural production. Io's mother's milk/ink pales in comparison to Christine's child/book. In the *Advision*, Christine arrives at the definitive maternal intellectual through images of herself.

Maintaining such a delicate balance between her feminine roles and her writing must not have been easy. Her success required a skillful navigation of a public life built to exclude women. She may have failed in the courts, but in her writing she would succeed in reaching her audience by privileging a maternal scheme over the paternal one of her early career. Her opinions would be heard. According to Ferrante, "there was a long history opposing women's teaching of men . . . Paul had said: 'But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in Silence' (1 Tim 2:12)" (Ferrante 12). Clearly, Christine found her way around these restrictions in her literature. She may have portrayed a woman's act of writing as a passive affair, but through her works, Christine actively sought the most effective way to reach her public and to advise.

Unfortunately, none of Christine's works feature the author figured as a teacher exclusively to women—the logical apogee of a literary *prise de conscience* such as the one found in *Cité des dames*, *Livre des trois vertus*, and the *Advision*. In fact, the next text that features the

author in an authoritative and instructive position is another mirror for princes. Charity Willard indicates that after the *Advision*, she turned to works designed to please the changing tastes of her patrons:

Burgundian tastes had their part in the change of direction to be observed in Christine's writings from 1405 onward. Burgundian interests were inclined toward history, education of the young, and political reform. . . . the relative security she must have felt at finding her works appreciated discouraged further revelations of her personal life and problems. Her autobiographical writings ceased until the very last years of her life. (Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 171)

If we accept this theory, Christine simply did not find the right environment to write herself as a teacher exclusively to women. Despite the lack of such a text, I do not believe that the new model described in detail in the *Advision* goes unrealized. It simply manifests itself in a form that pleased Christine's patrons. When she returned to her male audience, Christine dispensed with the paternal model that held such sway over her earlier instructive texts for men. Instead, she presents herself as the mother-intellectual in *Le livre du corps de policie*, boldly advising/mothering French society.

### ***Le livre du corps de policie***

*Le livre du corps de policie* is a long prose work that advises men concerning many aspects of public life.<sup>99</sup> I will show how Christine dispensed with the paternal model of her

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<sup>99</sup> The *Corps de policie* was a mirror for princes, but it also addressed two other classes, the knights and nobles and the common people. Since the general categories of nobles and common people could include men and/or women, it is necessary to briefly demonstrate that these sections were also aimed at a male audience. Christine writes, "Selon ce que me semble je treuve es escripts des aucteurs qui des meurs des nobles hommes on traitié que .vi. condicions par especial leur sont neces(saires) se ilz veulent avoir honneur, qui a cause de vaillance est deue a ceulx qui le desservent, ou aultrement leur noblesse est nulle si come moquerie de icelles condicions. La premiere est qu'ilz doivent trespaitement aimer els armes et garder le droit d'icelles, et en ce labour doit estre leur exercite" ("It seems to me that according to the writings of the authors on manners of noblemen, six conditions are especially necessary if they desire honor due for their merits. The first is they ought to love arms and the art of them perfectly, and they ought to practice that work") (*Corps de policie* 63). Obviously, this section is addressed to noblemen, as noblewomen would not normally bear arms. As for the common people, Christine divides them into three groups: the clergy (clerics), the burghers and merchants, and the common people. She first addresses clerics or students at the "University of Paris," an institution that did not admit women (*Corps de Policie* 95). As for the burghers and merchants, Christine writes, "les appellent les livres qui parlent d'eulx citoyens" ("Books refer to them as 'citizens'")

earlier instructive texts. Additionally, I will demonstrate how Christine replaces paternal authority through strategies designed to valorize her status as a woman. Working within the constraints of the genre, Christine also presents a powerful mother-intellectual, Valentina Visconti, who makes the allegorical vision of Io a reality. Christine abandons the paternal model of the *Epistre Othea* in the *Corps de policie* through her use of several elements: first-person narration, the humility topos, the body politic, and astrology.

Christine speaks throughout this text in the first person. She identifies herself in the first pages as “I, Christine.” She no longer yields the narrative voice to a prophetic figure and steps from behind her father’s image. When compared to the *Epistre Othea*, the *Corps de Policie* is a bold statement in the author’s own voice yet, Christine follows convention and presents herself humbly:

Et se par ignorance, comme elle soit femme non moult saichant, fault en aucunes choses que il lui pardonné, et soit plus reputeée sa bonne entencion qui ne tend fors a toute bonne fin que l’effect de son euvre. (*Corps de policie* 204)

And since she [Christine] is a woman of little knowledge, if by ignorance any faults are found, let her be pardoned and her good intention better known, for she intends only good to be the effect of her work. (*Body Politic* 109)<sup>100</sup>

Although the humility topos reappears in the *Corps de policie*, her father does not. In fact, Thomas de Pizan is not specifically mentioned in this text. Christine no longer stands behind or mimics her father as in the *Epistre Othea*’s first prologue. She fulfills this literary convention in a new way by strategically adopting a modest feminine stance in the pages of the *Corps de policie*, yet standing on her own as a woman. In the humility topos, she no longer veils herself

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(*Corps de Policie* 99). “Citizens” is a term that would normally apply to men at this time. Finally, in her address of the common people, Christine mentions “artisans” like masons and carpenters—occupations reserved for men (105).

<sup>100</sup> The French citations of the *Corps de policie* are taken from Robert H. Lucas’s 1967 transcription, and the English translations are taken from Kate Forhan’s 1994 translation. The numbers provided in the parenthetical references are the pages of the respective editions.



behind her father or a prophetic figure like him, nor does she compare herself to the philosophers of the past.

However, Christine actively engages elements of the paternal model, despite her father's absence from this text. First, the author bests her father at his own advising profession by posing as an adviser to all levels of French society, not just one royal personage.<sup>101</sup> Christine centers her text around the body politic metaphor gleaned, in her text, from a letter written by Plutarch to the Emperor Trajan.<sup>102</sup> Christine writes:

. . . le prince ou les princes tiennent le lieu du chief en tant qu'ilz sont ou doivent estre souverains et d'eulx doivent venir les singuliers establissemens tout ainsi comme de l'entendement de l'omme sourdent et viennent les foraines euvres que les membres achievent. Les chevaliers et les nobles tiennent le lieu des mains et des bras. Car tout ainsi que les bras de l'omme qui sont fors pour soustenir labeur et paine doivent ilz avoir la charge de deffendre le droit du prince et la chose publique, si sont aussi aux mains, car ainsi comme les mains deboutent les choses nuisibles doivent ilz mettre arriere et degetter toutes choses malfaisantes et inutiles. Les aultres gens de peuple sont comme le ventre, les pieds et les jambes. Car si comme le ventre reçoit tout en soy ce que prepare le chief et les membres, ainsi le fait de l'exercite du prince, et des nobles doit revertir ou bien et en l'amour publique si comme cy après sera plus declairé, et ainsi comme les jambes et piés soustiennent le fais du corps humain semblablement les laboureurs soustiennent tous les aultres estats. (*Corps de policie* 3)

There the prince and princes hold the place of the head in as much as they are or should be sovereign and from them ought to come particular institutions just as from the mind of a person springs forth the external deeds that the limbs achieve. The knights and nobles take the place of the hands and arms. Just as a person's arms have to be strong in order to endure labor, so they have the burden of defending the law of the prince and the polity. They are also the hands because, just as the hands push aside harmful things, so they ought push all harmful and useless things aside. The other kinds of people are like the belly, the feet, and the legs. Just as the belly receives all that the head and the limbs prepare for it, so, too, the activity of the prince and nobles ought to return to the public good, as will be better explained later. Just as the legs and feet sustain the human body, so, too, the laborers sustain all the other estates. (*Body Politic* 4)<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> This structure echoes that of her *Trois Vertus*.

<sup>102</sup> "Plutarch (c.AD 20-AD 120) Greek moralist and biographer, tutor to Emperor Trajan. . . he was much admired as the teacher of the most revered emperor" (Forhan *Body Politic* xxxviii) Christine chose Plutarch, the adviser to "the archetype of the virtuous king" on which to base her own authority to speak (Forhan, *Body Politic* xxxviii).

<sup>103</sup> Of course, peasants would not read her works, but her advice concerning them emphasizes that even the lowest class of people are important to the state.

As a royal adviser, Thomas de Pizan could only affect the “head” of the body politic. He did not address the “body” and “limbs” that were so necessary to the state’s proper functioning. In the *Corps de policie*, Christine developed her own political philosophy based in the body. As I have shown, Christine had a stake in naturalizing her participation in culture. By inscribing her advice under a body, associated with Nature’s forge, Christine takes advantage of a popular political metaphor to authorize her writing. In the *Advision*, the male body (of her son) is Christine’s text. Here, Christine writes the male body from head to feet. The three sections of her work are “On Princes,” “On Knights and Nobles,” and “On the Common People.”

Christine’s use of the body politic metaphor also dialogues with her specific historic circumstances. Internal strife in the royal family kept France from attaining any semblance of peace or unity after the death of Charles V.<sup>104</sup> The “head,” in this case, was floundering on its own leaving the rest of society to reap its excesses. Christine’s practical advice simply urged everyone to work together in order to protect France’s interests against possible foreign invaders.<sup>105</sup> For the author, all members of society are important to France’s success. In addition to the metaphoric ties between the *body* politic and Nature, I believe Christine exploits the leveling effect of the body politic as well. In the *Corps de policie* she authorizes her right, as

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<sup>104</sup> Charity Willard comments, “In 1393, shortly after the onset of Charles VI’s insanity, the dauphin Charles was only a year old. It was decided that, should the king die before the prince reached the age of fourteen, Louis of Orleans would exercise the regency and the queen, together with the dukes of Berry and Burgundy, would be the guardian of the royal children. This arrangement did not please the duke of Burgundy and was undoubtedly a factor in his attempt to try once more in the spring of 1403 to modify the situation in his own favor. During a period of the king’s active insanity, when Louis of Orleans was away from Paris, he tried, with the collaboration of the duke of Berry, to change the decrees governing the majority of the dauphin and the establishment of a regency. It was his idea to promote another ordinance proclaiming that in the case of the king’s death there would be no regency; the dauphin would be crowned at once, whatever his age; and the government would be carried on by the queen, the dukes, and the royal council. . . . Louis could have scarcely have been expected to agree with such a procedure . . .” (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 117).

<sup>105</sup> The Hundred Years War (1337-1453) had lapsed at this time due in part to England’s internal strife (as is evidenced by Christine’s references to the Henry IV seizing power from Richard II in the *Advision*).

a “lowly” woman, to speak on matters of state. In order to accomplish this, Christine establishes the worth of even the lowest members of society to the success of a nation.

In the *Epistre Othea*, Christine exploited mythological figures to rewrite women’s worth, but figures like Io have no place in the politically charged *Corps de policie*. She is careful not to engage the question of women’s value to society directly, for such an address would be out of place in a text like this one.

So how does Christine join the body politic, the male body? First, she writes it, thereby controlling its representation. Additionally, she simply writes herself (and women) an “in.” Although she wrote this text for a male audience, the lower classes are referred to in the body politic metaphor as “les aultres gens de peuple” (the other kinds of people). This vague category admits Christine. Indeed, as Christine “glosses” the body politic metaphor through her lengthy prose address to princes, knights, nobles, and finally the common people, women like herself do appear. In the text, she identifies with the definitive “others” of fifteenth-century society. The author writes, “. . . aussi qu’il doit avoir pitié des povres gentilz femmes, des vesves, et des orphelins et les secourir en leurs besoingnes pour l’amour de Dieu et de gentillesse. . .” (“Also that he should pity poor gentlewomen, widows, and orphans and succor their needs for the love of God and out of kindness”) (*Corps de policie* 13-14, *Body Politic* 10). Christine allies herself, as a widow, with poor women and helpless children. These unfortunates have the ability to affect the body, even if only through the men with whom they interact. She insists that the Prince, the “head,” acknowledge her/their needs, despite her/their position outside of the political sphere. Through her insistence, the author establishes her own importance to the highest social level through use of the body politic metaphor. Posing as a member of the lowest group,

Christine reinforces her assertion that if the needs of the most insignificant members of society (like herself) are ignored, then France will fall—indeed the body cannot move without the feet.

In this case, the body politic metaphor functions almost identically to the *Epistre Othea*'s final section, in which phrases like “Do not be ashamed to hear . . . good teaching, whoever may say it” emphasize that anyone, no matter their social class, sex, or background can offer wisdom. Kate Forhan comments, “. . . she believed in education, in social mobility based on merit, in civic and civil responsibility, in consultative politics, and in the dignity (167) of all members of society. Above all, she believed that, as a citizen of France, she had the right and the authority to speak to its rulers for the good of the nation” (166-167). Not only does the author believe that she has the right to address France's rulers, she feels it is her responsibility to advise all levels of society as a woman.

Christine was well aware that her reading public might be resistant to the idea of a woman advising/writing male society. Instead of subversively disarming her reader, the author simply asks the reader to cheer her on. Christine convinces her audience to join with her and enjoy the novelty of her comments, rather than automatically dismissing her text as “woman's work.” In the *Corps de police*, Christine boldly asks the reader to join her:

Se il est possible que de vice puist naistre vertu, bien me plaist en ceste partie estre passionnee come femme. Ainsi que plusieurs hommes au sexe feminin imposent non-sçavoir taire ne tenir soubz silence l'abondance des leurs corages, or viengene donc hors hardiement et se demonstre par plusiers ruisseaux la source et fontaine intarissable de mon corage qui ne peut estanchier de getter hors les desirs de vertu. . . . Et leur plaise de retenir l'enseignement du philosophe qui dist n'aies a desdaine pour sa petitesse quelque grant que tu soies celui que te dit bonne parole. (*Corps de police* 1-2)

If it is possible for vice to give birth to virtue, it pleases me in this part to be as passionate as a woman, since many men assume that the female sex does not know how to silence the abundance of their spirits. Come boldly, then and be shown the many inexhaustible springs and fountains of my courage, which cannot be staunched when it expresses the desire for virtue. . . . and remember the teaching of the Philosopher[Aristotle], who said,

“Do not disdain the wise words of the insignificant despite your own high position.”<sup>106</sup>  
(*Body Politic* 3-4)

This passage’s most striking feature is that she makes no apologies for her class or her sex. In fact, her statements add a feminine specificity to the general ideas expressed in the *Epistre Othea*’s conclusion. She is the “insignificant” voice worthy to speak “wise words” to princes, knights, nobles, and the common people. Later in the text, she puts her theory into practice: “Mais Dieu me soit tesmoing en sa retribucion comme je cuide dire veoir par ce qui me apert” (“But, God be my witness at the end, I say what I think!”) (*Corps de policie* 188/*Body Politic* 102). Indeed, Christine speaks her mind to an audience she views as receptive, and in the process confidently crushes the last vestiges of the paternal model—the prophetic figure.

In the *Corps de policie* the feminized paternal voice of Othea is silent. The author speaks as herself and ultimately dismisses astrology’s importance to the political world. Christine draws her political advice from the Ancients like Aristotle and Plutarch, whereas her father’s advised the king through divination. Her use of literary convention, basing advice on the Ancients, reinforces the difference between father and daughter’s advising. Kate Forhan comments, “A third convention [of the mirror for princes genre] concerns the key figures to whom much authority was given in the mirror for princes, a list that includes Aristotle, Seneca, Plutarch, Cicero, and Boethius” (*Body Politic* 33). Beyond convention, Christine also offers counsel based on her own past experiences. Much of the advice in the *Corps de policie* is practical, like that of the *Trois Vertus*, her earlier conduct manual for all of female French society. In the *Corps de policie*, her life events are reflected in the topics she chooses: Charles V, widows, astrologers, and even lawyers.

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<sup>106</sup> See Kate Forhan’s *The Book of the Body Politic*, xxxii.

Christine's contemporaries also appear as *exempla*, for advice stems not only from particular and general *history*, but also from the present. The Duke of Orleans and his wife, Valentina Visconti, appear. By rooting her counsel firmly in the (personal) past and present, Christine rejects her father's profession of astrology.<sup>107</sup> Her words of wisdom are not based on divination; instead, Christine looks to the ancients and her own past and present experience in order to offer advice. The author completes her rejection of the prophetic paternal model with a scathing pessimistic discussion of astrology.

Christine's boldest challenge to her father's intellectual authority centers in the author's portrayal of the "fatalist" astrologer. She states that a philosopher:

. . . par astrologie avoie preveue sa mort et l'avoit quoy il ne se depatoit du lieu ou quel il disoit qu'il devoit morir, il disoit que le mouvement du ciel le tenoit si fermement qu'il ne se pouoit partir, sur quoy il appert qu'il estoit d'opinion que l'influence du ciel chasse l'omme en ce qu'il lui doit avenir, pour laquele chose on peut veoir qu'il n'est si grant clerc qui en aucune ne erre et ne puist estre deceu. (*Corps de policie* 76).

. . . had foreseen his death by astrology and had announced it before the blow fell. But when someone asked him why he did not leave the place where he said he must die, he said that the movement of the heavens held him so firmly that he could not leave, from which it appears that he was of the opinion that the influence of the heavens drives one into what must become of him, which shows that he was not so great a clerk that he could not be deceived. (*Body Politic* 42)

The astrologer, the father figure, complacently waiting for death receives no sympathy from Christine:

Car ceste chose n'est mie vraye, quant aux operacions de l'ame qui euvre en la volenté. Car elle est plainement franche et a liberté et pouissance sur ses operacions, tele que non obstant queleque inclination ou influence du ciel, elle peut eslire quele partie lui plaist . . . la volenté laquele est franche ne peut estre contrainte par nulle action. . . . (*Corps de policie* 76)

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<sup>107</sup> Christine reinforces the value of her self-education in the face of her father's university training. In the *Advison*, Christine makes it clear that her autodidactic path circumvented her father's *sciences* and instead appealed to histories and literature. (See also page 63.)

Because this is not true with respect to the operations of the soul, which acts in freedom. It is clearly free and has liberty and power over its actions despite whatever inclination or influence of the heavens there might be. The soul can choose which part it pleases. . . . The will, which is free, cannot be constrained by anything. . . ." (*Body Politic* 43)<sup>108</sup>

She undermines astrology with the concept of free will. This particular astrologer contrasts sharply with other positive prophetic figures, like Othea, that people her texts.<sup>109</sup> The hopeless astrologer represents Thomas de Pizan's intellectual legacy as stagnant and unlinked to her own pursuits. Interpreted in this way, Christine does not need her father's model to move forward through her intellectual endeavors. Instead, she privileges the soul's independence from celestial phenomena and allies herself with popular religious objections to astrology.

In her earlier instructive texts for men, I argued that Christine's authority to advise derived from her adoption of the paternal model—of private life in the *Enseignemens moraux* and of public life in the *Epistre Othea*. Christine casts off these models in the *Corps de policie*. She defies her father's public roles with her own participation in political life. She advises as herself, not under the guise of being a father substitute for Jean, *and* she ultimately dispenses with valorizing prophetic figures and favors her own modes of advising. Her most poignant strategy to authorize herself as a political writer/adviser solidifies Christine's link to the maternal model. As I have shown, she poses as a mother of French society in the *Corps de policie*'s pages. She is Nature creating the body politic. More importantly, she boldly presents a real, contemporary example of the maternal intellectual in the pages of this instructive text for men.

Christine's *exemplum* is her own female contemporary, Valentina Visconti. Christine directly counters the paternal model of education and private life by portraying a mother as the

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<sup>108</sup> Charity Willard states, "although in her writings Christine was always careful to insist that her father's astrology did not carry him beyond the limits set by Christian dogma" (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 20).

<sup>109</sup> The astrologer held in place by his own predictions is what Patrice Boudet refers to as "bad" astrology in *The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*: "bad astrology [was] superstitious and divinatory, whose judgments would be based on a negation of free will" (124). Therefore, "good astrology . . . would confine itself to the study and prevision of natural phenomena" (Boudet 124).

custodian of her children's scholarly education. The figure of the maternal-intellectual appears early in the text. Christine writes:<sup>110</sup>

Si comme a fait aprendre ses enfans, . . . le tresprudent prince le duc d'Orleans qui a present vit, a l'instance de la de la tressaige bonne et vertueuse duchesse sa femme, laquele comme celle qui prise et honnoure le bien de sçavoir et de science est diligente come prudente mere que en lettres et toutes versus soient ses enfans tresbien apris.  
(*Corps de policie* 8-9)

So the very wise prince, the duc of Orleans, did . . . for his children, as he was asked by the very wise, good and virtuous duchess, his wife, who values and honors education and knowledge, and like a prudent mother is careful that letters and all the virtues are being learned by her children. (*Body Politic* 7)

The author replaces the allegorical references to Io in the *Epistre Othea* with a fifteenth-century woman who supervises her children's education. Christine no longer hides the mother-intellectual "under fable" like she did in the *Epistre Othea*.

Visconti reverses the author's personal experience of family life. In the paternal model, Christine's father directed intellectual, public life, while her mother dominated the domestic sphere. Christine's first violation of that structure occurred in the *Enseignemens moraux*. In this text, Christine encourages her son's intellect in the same way that Visconti encourages her children's education. The author's portrayal of Visconti allows the mother a stake in intellectual life. Furthermore, Visconti's husband, the Duke of Orleans, as a patron of the arts, is an intellectual, too. Christine privileges a mother-intellectual over the father-intellectual. Additionally, Visconti educates her children in her husband's presence. Unlike Christine, whose absent father and husband led to her unorthodox advising of her son, Visconti takes the initiative herself to demand an education in "letters" for her children. By writing Visconti, Christine legitimizes her own role as mother-intellectual by identifying herself with a high-ranking

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<sup>110</sup> Charity Willard describes Valentina Visconti, the Duke of Orleans's wife, "The influence of the duchess herself was far from negligible. She was a very literate princess with a library of her own, some of which she brought with her from Milan" (*Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* 52).



intellectual woman. Christine also expands the possibilities of women's participation in public life. In Christine's view, a woman need not suffer hardship and loss to acquire and share knowledge. By using Visconti's image, Christine returns to her youth, and this time, the learned woman and her male counterpart coexist and communicate in the same sphere.

*Le corps de policie* is the culmination of Christine's search for her own identity. The author no longer relies on paternal authority to achieve subjectivity—to speak in her own voice to the French public. Instead, she strikes out on her own as a woman developing new and positive strategies to counter misogynist notions that dismissed women's writing. In the *Enseignemens moraux*, the roots of Christine's maternal model appear. In the *Epistre Othea* develops these ideas allegorically. Finally, in the *Corps de policie*, Christine presents a real and powerful mother-intellectual to the public world, Valentina Visconti.

Before writing the *Cité des dames*, the *Trois vertus*, and the *Advision*, Christine relied on a model in her instructional works for men that disguised her sex with paternal influence. This strategy, however clever, restricted Christine's ability to express herself. Essentially, she taught blindly, denying herself in order to access public structures. Christine's *Corps de policie* seems to acknowledge this:

. . . se ce n'est a aucuns si pervers que leur souffit seulement qu'on voye qu'ilz saichent les sciences. Mais de l'effect de sapience ne font riens quant en eulx mesmes, mais l'apprennent aux aultres. Si ressemblent teles gens qui monstrent sapience et riens n'en font ceulx qui meurent de fain emprés leur avoir, et les aultres s'en aident. (*Corps de policie* 180-181)

If people are so perverse that it suffices them that others think that they know the sciences, and they do not use their wisdom for themselves, but only teach it to others, then they resemble people who die of hunger with food near them. (*Body Politic* 97-98)

In her early instructive texts, Christine imitated men's (her father's) models. Although these works offer brief flashes of the maternal model, she ultimately privileges the paternal to the

maternal. In the *Enseignemens*, she reproduces her own intellectual formation, and in the *Epistre*, Othea dominates the narrative, while the maternal Io is simply one in a hundred examples. In light of the above quote, the author desperately sought to establish her authority to advise and write, and she neglected to use her scholarly wisdom to alleviate her own suffering as an isolated intellectual woman. In her early teachings to men, she was “dying of hunger with food near *her*.”

In the author’s texts for women, Christine became a student of herself and took time to explore her worth as a woman. In the *Corps de policie*, Christine returns to addressing men, but this time she does it on her own terms. The author imparts wisdom and discards her father’s legacy for one of her own. In this text, Christine manifests the tenets of her innovative model: she advises and writes based on her merit as a woman. If the presence of the author’s works in famous intellectual women’s libraries are any indication, Christine’s model worked not only for the author, but for other women as well. Charity Willard catalogues Christine’s works in the literary collections of learned women in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and up to the mid-sixteenth centuries.<sup>111</sup> The author laid the groundwork for women writers to come like Jeanne d’Albret whose grandmother, Louise of Savoy had access to works like the *Cité des dames* and whose mother, Marguerite de Navarre, even referred to Christine’s works in one of her own texts, the famous *Heptaméron*.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> For a detailed discussion of the circulation of Christine’s works among intellectual women, see Chapter 11 of Charity Willard’s *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*.

<sup>112</sup> See Charity Willard’s *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, 212 & 220.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Daughters, Wives, Mothers and Monarchy:**  
**Jeanne d'Albret's Evolution From "adolescent pawn" to Autonomous Queen<sup>113</sup>**

Que vous portez le sceptre Navarroys  
Et de Junon la majesté cogneuë,  
A vous sans plus ceste gloire n'est deuë,  
Elle est commune à la race des Roys.

Je jure donc, & si je me perjure,  
soit supplier vangeur de ceste injure,  
Que France n'a un plus divin esprit  
Que cette Royne: & que sa mere encore,  
Qui de ses vers nostre siecle redore,  
N'a jamais rien plus doctement escrit. —Joachim du Bellay, 1569<sup>114</sup>

For modern-day scholars, it is hard to know what name to mention first when writing of Jeanne d'Albret—that of her mother, Marguerite d'Angoulême, or her son, Henri IV. Between her mother's literary reputation and her son's time as King of France, Albret is often dismissed as the cold-hearted daughter of the great writer or briefly mentioned as the mother of a beloved French King. Félix Frank, writing in 1897, commented, "Jeanne était plus que froide pour sa mère, qui contrariait ses sentiments . . ." (9). Joachim du Bellay wrote his verses during Albret's lifetime—after her mother's death, but before her son's ascendance to the French throne. The poet offers a perspective that all studies of Jeanne d'Albret should consider—that is, Albret was a monarch in her own right, and her writings were valued in her own era.

**Jeanne d'Albret and Her Critics**

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Jeanne d'Albret's work experienced a revival, and many of her texts were edited and published for the first time in the modern era.

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<sup>113</sup> I have borrowed the term "adolescent pawn" from Nancy Roelker's biography, *Queen of Navarre*.

<sup>114</sup> These verses are excerpted from "Sonnet à la Royne de Navarre, avec les responses de la dicte Royne" found in the 1569 *Les œuvres françaises de Joachim du Bellay*, 44, 48. Joachim du Bellay (1522?-1560), along with Pierre Ronsard, was one of the founders of the *Pléiade*, a sixteenth-century group of writers who defended the value of France's language and literature. These verses were likely written between Jeanne's father's death in 1555 and du Bellay's death in 1560. Ironically, Pierre Ronsard wrote poetry against the Huguenot cause.

During this revival, critics attributed her accomplishments to her masculine spirit. In this view, no average woman could have single-handedly resisted the French and Spanish crowns as well as the papacy, both politically and ideologically, on her own.

M. de Rochambeau, who collected Albret's letters along with those of her husband, comments:

En butte à des complots qu'elle déjouait avec une grande finesse, elle montrait, dans l'administration du royaume de Navarre, une habileté et une sagesse qui lui font honneur. La fondation de l'académie d'Orthez, les assemblées des États de Béarn et ses ordonnances révèlent chez cette princesse des qualités d'organisation peu communes. (Rochambeau viii)

Although Rochambeau seems to give Albret credit in her own right, later he is sure to emphasize her *mâle courage*: "Ainsi mourut Jehanne d'Albret, remarquable par son mâle courage et la pureté de ses mœurs : quelques reproches qu'ait mérités son intolérance en matière religieuse, on doit reconnaître l'énergie de son caractère, une intelligence et une élévation d'idées qu'on ne trouve pas chez les femmes de son siècle" (Rochambeau ix).

Alphonse de Ruble, who edited Albret's *Mémoires*, letters, and poetic works, cites the sixteenth-century Protestant champion, Agrippa d'Aubigné, who wrote in the *Histoire universelle* that Albret was "... une princesse n'ayant de femme que le sexe, l'âme entière ès de choses viriles, l'esprit puissant aux grandes affaires, le cœur invincible ès adversités. . ." (x-xi).<sup>115</sup> Ruble even uses Albret to emphasize that women were naturally vengeful creatures, when he writes, "Antoine de Bourbon est représenté comme une victime du cardinal de Lorraine, un homme faible et trompé, plus à plaindre qu'à blâmer. Il faut une rare élévation de sentiments pour laisser tant de magnanimité à un cœur de femme" (Ruble XI). For these critics, Albret was

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<sup>115</sup> Agrippa d'Aubigné, "who was only eight when his father showed him the corpses of the Huguenots executed as a result of the Amboise conspiracy of 1560, devoted his life (1552-1630) to the Protestant cause, as soldier and military engineer, as envoy, as pamphleteer and satirist, . . . and as historian (*L'histoire universelle*, 1618-1626; *The Universal History*)" (Langer 232).

an exception to the rule of gender, and their comments emphasize the need to review Albret's image in a framework in which women's accomplishments are praised in their own right.

Albret's second major revival occurred in the late 1960's and continued through the 1970's. Authors like Nancy Roelker (1968) and Yves Cazaux (1973) wrote biographies, and in 1970 Slatkine re-released Alphonse de Ruble's *Mémoires et Poésies*. Nancy Roelker's biography of Albret is useful, but Roelker's opinions, like many critics before her, are biased at times towards Albret's more popular mother.<sup>116</sup> With few exceptions, Albret then fell back into obscurity. Only in the past ten years has her life come to light once again, with a newly edited version of her *Mémoires* by Bernard d'Aas appearing in October 2007.<sup>117</sup> Her letters have never been collected and published. Many of them can be found scattered in various works, but most remain accessible only in manuscript form.

Since the majority of Albret's writings are political, studies usually center the importance of Albret's texts in their dialogue with historical events or her political maneuvering. When Albret's writings stray from political matters into more "literary" territory, they are commonly overshadowed by her mother's illustrious reputation.<sup>118</sup> In this chapter, I will read her works as more than just a political dialogue or a lackluster imitation of her mother's art. Like the works of

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<sup>116</sup> "Jeanne was hard to love and Marguerite was a generous person with strong affections and loyalties" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 70). "Victim of a vain and insensitive husband, pushed aside by the new regime, treated with indifference by her daughter, her health gone, Marguerite had only her religion and the memories of a glorious past to console her" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 75).

<sup>117</sup> Works from the last ten years include: *Jeanne d'Albret, la mère passionnée d'Henri IV* by Françoise Kermina, Perrin: Paris, 1998; *Queen Jeanne and the Promised Land* by David Bryson, Leiden: Boston, 1999; *Jeanne III d'Albret* by Bernard d'Aas, Atlantica: Biarritz, 2002; *Jeanne d'Albret et sa cour* by Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore and Philippe Chareyne, Champion: Paris, 2004.

<sup>118</sup> Faith Beasley's comments, although directed at canon formation in the seventeenth century, are relevant here: "... feminist critics have been uncovering past female literary productions that call into questions the validity of the traditional repressive and patriarchal literary canon. In addition to uncovering women's participation in literature, they have discovered literary creations that have fallen through the crevices left by stringent definitions of genres and 'literariness'" (Beasley, *Revising Memory* 5).

Christine de Pizan, Albret's texts show her move from naive daughter to a politically-minded individual.

In this chapter, I will also show how Albret's writing depicts her relationship to her mother and son without eclipsing her own hard-won individuality and autonomy. She wrote from the perspective of daughter and mother during her life's different phases. The presence of filial and maternal references in her texts—be it a letter to her own mother or a description of her son—evidences Albret's journey towards autonomy. This chapter's focus is how the maternal presence in her works informs her journey from “adolescent pawn” to autonomous queen.

Jeanne d'Albret's writings present various characterizations of the maternal marked by the phase of life in which she wrote. For the purposes of this argument, I will divide Albret's life into two phases, pre- and post-motherhood.

Before she was married, Albret's texts center around her relationship to her own mother and characterize Marguerite as an obstacle to her own desire, especially in her marriage protest. In a series of poetic letters written after her marriage to Antoine de Bourbon, Albret portrays her mother as entrenched in masochistic maternal love. In this exchange, Marguerite entreats her daughter to share in maternal suffering.

Antoine de Bourbon is the mediator between the pre- and post-motherhood phases of Albret's life. In the letters, he provides the conduit by which Marguerite's daughter escapes her mother's overbearing grief, yet Albret's journey to selfhood did not end with the separation from her mother. Albret's identity was overshadowed by her husband and her own role as mother after leaving Marguerite. Later, the Protestant religion divided husband and wife, and Albret continued her journey to independence through “mothering” her subjects.

Albret wrote from the maternal perspective after her estrangement from Antoine, abandoning her role as dutiful wife. The mother figure is a political tool that strengthens Albret's authority as queen over her subjects in her later writings. From this period, I have chosen to examine Albret's correspondence with another mother, Madame de Langey. As I will show, Albret's use of queenly authority to interfere in her subject's mother-daughter relationship is in dialogue with the earlier poetic correspondence with Marguerite.<sup>119</sup>

In her writings after Antoine's death, maternal references work in tandem with her claim of the Protestant faith to support Albret's resistance to the papacy, as well as to the French and Spanish crowns. From this period, the most poignant texts are her *Mémoires*, as well as two letters written to other powerful women, Catherine de Medici and Elizabeth I. In these works, Albret writes as an autonomous queen, and her maternal references appear in a broad political context. Through deft manipulation, especially in the letters, mother images serve her political and religious ambitions.

Examining these texts along with Albret's life events, I will show that ultimately, Albret did not center her identity on traditional conceptions of daughterhood/motherhood—she did not define herself by her mother or son. Rather, she exploited the roles of dutiful daughter and mother to establish her autonomy within the cadre of the Protestant cause. In an ironic twist, her political story begins with the exploitation of Albret's political value by her parents and the King of France. As a political tool, she is abruptly distanced from her tranquil childhood and forced into the public sphere.

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<sup>119</sup> A series of letters written by Albret to Madame de Langey concern the conversion of Langey's daughter, Catherine.

## Protesting Marriage

Jeanne d'Albret was the only surviving child of Henri d'Albret and Marguerite d'Angoulême, also known as Marguerite de Navarre.<sup>120</sup> Born November 16, 1528, she was the sole heir to her mother and father's domains that bordered French territory. The French king, François I, was Marguerite's brother and Albret's uncle. Albret was raised by her governess, the Baillive de Caen, away from court society, while her father pursued his own political ambitions, and her mother followed her brother's court from place to place.

Albret was of little consequence to anyone during her childhood, but when she came of marriageable age, her father, uncle, and even mother, all had different ideas on how to exploit her political value. The lands to which she was an heiress were spread throughout the area covered by modern-day France, but the most valuable part of her future kingdom, especially Béarn and Navarre, bordered Spain.

Her future husband would be king of both Marguerite's and Henri II's lands, and he would have family ties to the king of France. Consequently, Albret attracted many suitors, and her uncle arranged a marriage for her. Albret's first contribution to her own story is a 1541 marriage protest written when she was only twelve years old. Albret's protest had little effect, and she was married to the Duke of Cleves on June 14, 1541.

Jeanne's vehement protest is a strong statement against the proposed marriage, but in reality, Albret's objection was possibly a reflection of her parents' dissatisfaction with the match and a ploy to ensure an easy annulment if they found a more suitable arrangement. Since Henri and Marguerite had no son (he had died in infancy), and Salic law did not predominate in

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<sup>120</sup> All biographical information, unless otherwise specified, was taken from Nancy Roelker's *Queen of Navarre: Jeanne d'Albret*.



Navarre or Albret, she was the future queen. Her political importance as the King's niece and heir to her parents' kingdom only complicated her life.

In 1540, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, proposed a union between Albret and his son Philippe in hopes of securing lands bordering and within French territory. Albret's father supported this marriage, for he stood to regain part of his lands, *Basse Navarre*, lost in an earlier treaty between François I and Charles V. François I, Albret's uncle, did not favor the marriage or any thought of political ties between France and the Empire. He proposed to marry Albret to the Duke of Cleves, a German prince with a formidable military force. Roelker comments, "We know that the estates of Béarn, no doubt with considerable assistance from Henri d'Albret, objected to the Cleves marriage on the grounds that marriage with a German prince would prevent their future queen from living among her subjects and would seriously jeopardize the continued existence of the 'kingdom'" (*Queen of Navarre* 58).<sup>121</sup>

As her father saw it, Albret's marriage to Philippe, Charles V's son, would solidify his sovereignty over Albret and Navarre, whereas her marriage to a German prince would not further his ambitions. This likely troubled Marguerite as well, but her loyalty to her brother took priority over maternal sentiment. Additionally, François I must have realized that if relations with Cleves deteriorated, he would need a way to separate his niece from the Duke. Hence, her father, mother, and uncle all had a stake in her signed marriage refusal.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> "The Duchy of Cleves, strategically located in the Rhine Valley, already had diplomatic ties with France, which served the consistent Valois [French royal] policy of building alliances in the Germanies to weaken the Hapsburgs [including Holy Roman Emperor Charles V]. Twenty-four-year-old William de la Marck, Duke of Cleves in 1540, was eager to cement the diplomatic advantage by a family alliance with the Valois, and in January of that year asked François I for Jeanne's hand in marriage. The King took the occasion to bind Cleves more firmly by requiring the Duke to furnish him troops" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 46).

<sup>122</sup> Roelker discusses this topic in Chapter two of her work, *Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre*. Despite a lengthy discussion, Roelker concludes that the real story remains a mystery.

Albret's marriage refusal writes against the possible political intrigue surrounding her union with Cleves. In the document, she describes her mother and father as staunch supporters of the marriage. In fact, she claims they will force it upon her. However, as I will show, there is an imbalance in Albret's portrayal that gives an early indication of Albret's relationship to her mother. Her entry into writing portrays her mother, not her father or uncle, as the primary villain forcing the marriage.

Albret composed several protests, but she wrote the most personal one the night before the public engagement ceremony with Cleves. In this work, she is a hapless princess—nothing more than a political tool and too young at the age of twelve to demand a marriage of her choosing.

The document's purpose is to justify the actions that will follow (her marriage, etc.) while maintaining that she does not want to marry Cleves. The work begins with Albret's formal declaration that she has never and will never consent to the marriage between her and the Duke.

Moi, Jehanne de Navarre, continueant mes protestacions que j'ay cy-devant faites, èsquelles je pariste, dis et déclare et proteste encoires par ceste presente que le mariage que l'on veult faire de moy au duc de Clèsves est contre ma volonté ; que je n'y ay jamais consenti et n'y consentiray, . . . ("Protestation" 291)

Albret will submit unwillingly to the marriage due to her fear of (and duty to) her uncle, King François I, and her mother and father:

. . . et que tout ce que je y pourray faire ou dire par cy-après, dont l'on pourroit dire que je y auroie consenti, ce sera par force, oultre mon grey et vouloir, et pour craincte du Roy, du roy mon père et de la royne ma mère, que m'en a menassé et faict foueter par la baillyve de Caen, ma gouvernante, laquelle par plusieurs fois m'en a pressée par comandement de la royne ma mère, me menassant que, si je ne fasois, au faict dudit mariage, tout ce que ledit Roy voudroit et que si je ne m'y consentoie, je serois tant fessé et maltraictée que l'on me feroit mourir, et que je seroie cause de la perte et destruction de mes père et mère et de leur maison ; ("Protestation" 291-292)

Although François I and her parents are written as villains in this text, her mother is specifically cited as the active violent presence threatening to punish Albret through her surrogate mother, the Baillive de Caen. Marguerite, not her father or uncle, orders Albret's governess to beat Albret into submission.<sup>123</sup>

This document's importance not only centers on the violent maternal reference, but also in Albret's connection to God. In this text, the maternal and God are separate and opposed to one another, but later they will unite in her political writings to authorize Albret's actions as queen. The document continues with a section that foreshadows Albret's future life. It echoes profoundly the Protestant sentiments that permeate her later works.

. . . dont je suis entrée en telle craincte et peur . . . que je ne sçay à quy avoir recours que à Dieu, quant je vois que mes père et mère m'ont délaissée, lesquels sçayvent bien ce que je leur ay dict, et que jamais je n'ayeroie le duc de Clesves et n'en veulx point.  
("Protestation" 292).

Albret portrays herself as completely alone. Her will is contrary to that of her parents, and it is only a daughter's reluctance that troubles this marriage. In this refutation, perspective is key. From Albret's point of view, her parents and uncle are villains. From the political world's standpoint, Albret's parents and uncle are free from intrigue—the innocent victims of a young girl's insolence. Caught between political forces, Albret turns to God, inaugurating a long tradition of Albret's authorizing her voice through religion when she stands alone.<sup>124</sup> In this first

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<sup>123</sup> This small detail possibly carried grave political importance. Albret's mother was likely strongly opposed to the union of her daughter with Cleves. Roelker comments that "François I became increasingly irritated, and accused his sister of going back on her word and his brother-in-law of playing a double game" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 47). This public statement about her mother would have eased two suspicions circulating among court circles and prominent in her brother's mind. One, that Marguerite was vehemently opposed to the marriage, and perhaps, even more importantly, that Albret's father was not conspiring to marry Albret to the Spanish emperor's son, Philippe. This was only one of the many complications that could have convinced Albret to write her declaration which allowed for an easy annulment when a more advantageous marriage presented itself. A document like this one inspired confidence, even as it eroded marital sentiment.

<sup>124</sup> Even with God, it seems, Jeanne speaks on her own terms. At first she says that she does not know to whom to appeal except to God, but then she continues with ". . . j'appelle Dieu et vous à tesmoings, et vous signez avec moy ma protestacion et d'avoir souvenance des forces, violances et contrainctes don l'on use contre moy pour le faict

writing, Albret portrays herself as completely subject to her mother's (and father's and uncle's) will.

François I's political interests changed when war with Charles V resumed. Consequently, in 1545, Albret's marriage was annulled.<sup>125</sup> François I died in 1547. Against her mother's wishes, Albret was then married to Antoine de Bourbon, duc de Vendôme. Antoine was a Prince of the Blood, yet his hopes for the French throne were distant.<sup>126</sup> By marrying Albret, the ambitious Antoine was in direct line to become King of Albret's domains. Like his father-in-law, Antoine was obsessed with enlarging his kingdom. The marriage took place on October 20, 1548, and the separation between mother and daughter inspired a poetic epistolary exchange. In this series of letters, Albret's will emerges and the dutiful daughter of the marriage protest strikes out on her own.<sup>127</sup> Even though she no longer grapples with the threat of physical violence, I will show that her mother's violent emotion ultimately drives this mother-daughter exchange and rejects the claim claim that Albret coldly dismisses Marguerite's "plight."

### **The Poetic Mirror of *mère et fille***

The short series of poetic correspondence that treats Albret's transition from daughter to wife survives in two manuscripts.<sup>128</sup> Several critics have discussed these letters, summarizing

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dudit mariage" ("Protestation" 292). Apparently Jeanne is not alone, and her witnesses, J. d'Arras, Francès Navarro, and Arnaul Duquesne, by signing their names, are supporting her cause. This is typical of her later political writings when she frequently couples herself with another when she writes as a widow, for example, her use of "mon fils et moy" in her *Mémoires*.

<sup>125</sup> Charles V was the Holy Roman Emperor, as well as the King of Spain.

<sup>126</sup> "Antoine de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme, directly descended from Robert, sixth son of St. Louis, was 'First Prince of the Blood, that is, next in line to the succession of the French throne after the sons of Henri II if they had no male heirs'" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 76).

<sup>127</sup> As the letters of royalty, her writings were destined to be collected and published, even the ones she might have preferred to keep private. Viewing her work this way, Albret's letters become much more than personal correspondence. Albret corresponded with her family and friends, European leaders, and her subjects. All her letters did not survive, but the surviving letters provide sufficient material for analysis within the context of this study.

<sup>128</sup> The two manuscripts are Bibliothèque Nationale: Volume: Folio 58 v<sup>o</sup> et ms. 883 f<sup>o</sup> 32 v<sup>o</sup>. Lefranc comments, "Les dernières œuvres de la reine de Navarre, lesquelles n'ont encore esté imprimées. Le manuscrit des Dernières

their content and criticizing their style. They were first believed by E. Frémy to be letters written between Catherine de Medici and her daughter, Élisabeth. His work, *Les Poésies inédites de Catherine de Médicis*, was published in two 1883 issues of the *Correspondant*. Later, two critics, Baguenault de Puchesse and B. de La Grèze contested Frémy's attribution and asserted that the letters were indeed an exchange between Marguerite de Navarre and her daughter, Jeanne d'Albret.<sup>129</sup> In 1893, Abel Lefranc published seven of the letters in his work, *Jeanne d'Albret, Mémoires et poésies*. Lefranc comments, "Les épîtres adressées à Jeanne d'Albret ne sont pas peu importantes, puisqu'on ne possédait jusqu'à présent qu'un très petit nombre d'indices sur les rapports entretenus par Marguerite avec sa fille, après le mariage de celle-ci avec Antoine de Bourbon" (XLIV).<sup>130</sup> Lefranc claims that Albret's responses affirm that she and her mother had a good relationship:

Le ton en est véritablement fort tendre : un gracieux badinage s'y mêle à des plaintes et à des regrets réciproques au sujet du mal de l'absence. . . Les réponses de celle-ci, écrite avec facilité, ne sont pas exemptes de préciosité. Elles se ressentent même, à certains points de vue, de l'influence exercée par la reine sur l'éducation littéraire de sa fille. On rencontre dans les unes comme dans les autres d'intéressantes allusions, en même temps que la preuve de la bonne entente qui n'avait cessé de régner entre les deux princesses. (Lefranc XLIV-XLV)

Lefranc's last statement is naive, considering, at the very least, the text of Albret's marriage refusal.

In his 1897 work, *Dernier voyage de la reine de Navarre, Marguerite d'Angoulême*, Félix Frank added new knowledge by revealing three letters related to this exchange located in a second manuscript. These three missives further clarified the circumstances of the mother-

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Œuvres se compose de deux cents feuillets de papier. L'écriture date du milieu du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. . . En ce qui touche les épîtres. . . , j'ai pu retrouver, grâce à M. Picot, un second manuscrit, dont les variantes m'ont été d'un précieux secours" (Lefranc V).

<sup>129</sup> The information concerning the "history" of the letters was gleaned from Frank's *La dernière voyage de la reine de Navarre*. See pages 5-10 for more details.

<sup>130</sup> Most critics choose to intuit Albret's feelings from Antoine's responses.

daughter exchange. In his work, Frank presents an additional letter from Albret to Marguerite and offers brief summaries of the seven presented in Lefranc's work. Commenting on a letter from Albret to her mother, Frank writes,

Le vocabulaire de Jeanne d'Albret est si restreint, le cercle de ses idées—en face de sa mère—si borné, sa versification si novice, que non seulement elle emprunte plus possible les termes de la reine, mais se copie & se répète elle-même avec une gaucherie d'écolière qui la trahit d'emblée. On sent dans ce verbiage la gêne qui, en dépit des protestations affectueuses de sa part, existe toujours entre elle & sa mère,. . . C'est vraiment, selon son formule, un « debvoir » dont elle s'acquitte. (18-19)

Emphasizing that Albret's letters have little literary value and simply reproduce her mother's themes, Frank quickly closes this discussion leaving the reader to intuit what he termed, "la gêne qui . . . existe toujours entre elle & sa mère. . ." Frank, unlike Lefranc, allows that Marguerite and her daughter might not have been in perfect harmony.

In her brief discussion of the letters, Nancy Roelker speculates that the uneasiness that probably existed between the two was "partly the result of guilt on both sides" (*Queen of Navarre* 86). Roelker concludes that Albret was emotionally tied up with Antoine, her husband, and had little need for reassurance from her mother. Roelker relies mainly on Pierre Jourda's interpretation for her commentary, and indeed this is also Jourda's conclusion. Jourda's study offers many interesting insights to the letters, but he, like Roelker and Frank, do not read the letters as evidence of Albret's emerging individuality. However, Jourda reads Marguerite as emotionally invested in her daughter.<sup>131</sup>

The poetic letters of Marguerite and Albret are a conundrum for many reasons. Some critics see them as a tender exchange, while others see them as Albret's cold rejection of her mother's love in favor of her new husband. I would like to build on these interpretations by viewing these letters from another perspective—that of the mother-daughter mirror.

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<sup>131</sup> See Roelker *Queen of Navarre* 84.

Katharine Jensen has worked extensively on the implications of François de Grenaille's mother-daughter mirror found in his 1640 conduct manual, *L'honneste fille*. Although Grenaille wrote in the seventeenth century, his work as interpreted by Jensen is useful in understanding how Albret asserts her own independence by turning away from the mother-mirror and focusing on her husband. Jensen comments:

Mother-daughter reflectivity was a behavioral ideal intended to consolidate and reproduce both aristocratic privilege and Catholic investments in female virginity, chastity, domesticity, and subordination to men. Above all, a mother was supposed to form her daughter in her own virtuous image. Yet in one of his expressions of mother-daughter reflectivity, Grenaille reveals that mothers might find gratification in molding their daughters into second virtuous selves not simply because they would be fulfilling their Catholic, aristocratic duty; mothers could also invest narcissistically in their molding project and exercise both power and ambition: "Les femmes ne servent pas seulement à . . . former [les honnêtes filles], mais comme elles en prennent le dessein sur elles-mêmes, et que pour produire une fille la mère fait son image; on peut encore dire qu'elles ont le même droit sur leur ouvrage qu'a un Peintre sur son portrait." With rights over their filial self-image and "chef-d'œuvre," mothers are clearly accorded dominance in the mirroring relationship, while daughters are expected to be subordinate to maternal authority. (Jensen, "Mother-Daughter" 109)

Rather than a correspondence characterized as *fort tendre*, I posit that Albret's letters are a statement of independence from her mother. I have chosen to analyze Marguerite's letters in tandem with her daughter's in order to explore the space between the two extremes of *tendresse* and *froideur*. In this space, Albret's individuality and strength emerges.

In order to better understand Albret's participation in these letters, it is useful to discuss the circumstances that shaped her mother's writing in this exchange. Jeanne d'Albret came from a line of intellectual women. Her grandmother, Louise of Savoy, was a noted scholar, and Marguerite de Navarre's works easily attest to her erudition. Marguerite de Navarre was a great writer who protected Evangelical scholars and even dabbled in the movement herself.<sup>132</sup> For a

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<sup>132</sup> "Weakened by the sophistry and intellectual arrogance of its theologians, the immoral behavior of its prelates, the petty rivalries among its monastic orders, the ignorance and superstitions of the vast majority of its members, it [the

time, she even enlisted her brother, François I, to protect her Evangelical contemporaries like Lefèvre d’Etaples and Erasmus. Her actions were not without repercussions, and as the University of Paris became more powerful (and dangerous) during the sixteenth century, Evangelical writers like Marguerite were forced to write privately or to leave France.<sup>133</sup> For Marguerite, leaving France was not an option. Her brother was the king, and her domains, including Navarre and Albret (by marriage), also were located within the borders of François I’s kingdom.

Marguerite’s husband, Henri d’Albret did not support her dabbling in any “unorthodox” religious movements, and eventually, her brother gave in to pressure from the University of Paris and cracked down on the Evangelicals. Marguerite bowed to her brother’s decision, as she always did. Many critics have described Marguerite’s complete dependence on and devotion to her brother as an obsession. Marguerite’s scheming husband, Henri d’Albret, also dominated her. Since the agendas of her brother and husband were usually at odds with one another, Marguerite experienced a tremendous amount of inner conflict. In most cases, she publicly sided with her brother against her husband, and more importantly, against her daughter’s best interest.

The exchange of letters—one of the last works by Marguerite, one of Albret’s first—are poetic expressions of maternal and filial sentiment and a reflection of their history as mother and daughter. Albret’s governess and foster mother, the Baillive de Caen, raised Albret in the country away from her parents. Marguerite followed her brother’s court faithfully and spent

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church] was no longer able to meet the spiritual needs of Christianity. . . . French Evangelism was a phenomenon of great complexity. It combined the crudest and most biting satire with the most authentic mysticism. And faith, demanding and aroused, sought to manifest itself not only in word but also in deed, throughout social and political life. . . . The main theological feature of Evangelism was its logocentrism: not only is God always and infinitely *present* in his Word; God and his Word are also one, identical to the point of being indistinguishable” (Defaux 162-164).

<sup>133</sup> This information concerning Evangelism and the University of Paris’s reaction are taken from Gérard Defaux’s article, “Evangelism,” page 166-167.



little time with her daughter. As mentioned earlier, Marguerite's emotional ties to her brother dominated her life, rendering her relationship to her husband and daughter secondary. When her brother died on March 31, 1547, Marguerite was inconsolable, and it appears that her intense emotional bond transferred not to her estranged husband, but to her daughter, Albret. When Henri II proposed Albret's marriage to Antoine de Bourbon, Marguerite was violently opposed to the match (although Albret was likely pleased with the choice). Her daughter was married against the mother's wishes on October 20, 1548. Henri II of France described Marguerite as inconsolable. Roelker writes,

The King's [Henri II's] letter of October 24 (to Montmorency) refers again to Jeanne and her mother, "The Queen of Navarre is at swords' points with her husband, out of love for her daughter, who does not care about her mother [ne tient compte de sa mère]. You have never seen anyone cry as much as my aunt did on leaving, and if it had not been for [my insistence] she would never have gone with her husband." (*Queen of Navarre* 75)

Marguerite and Albret wrote their poetic letters almost a year after the marriage after a stay together at Cauterets.

The first letters from both Marguerite and Albret were probably written and sent at the same time, likely in May 1549.<sup>134</sup> Marguerite was a well-known writer by this time. Even though her most famous work, the *Heptaméron*, appeared posthumously, works like *Le Miroir de l'âme pecheresse* had been published during her lifetime. As a writer, it is not surprising that

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<sup>134</sup> Alphonse de Ruble places the date just after Albret's marriage to Antoine de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme in October 1548: "Il n'y a guère de doute à concevoir touchant la date qu'il convient d'attribuer à ces lettres, encore qu'elles ne renferment aucune indication chronologique. Nous possédons sûrement dans ces sept pièces la correspondance échangée entre Marguerite et Jeanne, vers la fin d'octobre 1548, aussitôt après leur séparation, lorsque la jeune duchesse partit pour Vendôme avec son époux." (Lefranc XLIV-XLV) However, since Ruble did not base his date on other letters present in MS 883, Frank's date of "Mai 1549," the month of Albret's departure from Cauterets, is likely more accurate (Frank 15).

Marguerite writes metaphorically to express her sadness.<sup>135</sup> She does not specifically refer to her daughter or herself, but instead chooses an artistic approach to their silent parting:

Pour nostre adieu, non dict mais bien senty,  
Le ciel ne s'est à pleurer consenty,  
Car en voiant la couverte douleur  
Il a couvert sa pluie de chaleur,  
Ne se mouvant à pleurer ne plouvoir,  
Tant que sans pleurs nos yeulx il a peu veoir. (Letter I, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 10)

For our goodbye, not voiced but felt deeply,  
The sky did not allow itself to cry,  
Because seeing the hidden pain  
It covered its rain with heat,  
Moving itself to neither cry nor rain,  
As long as it could see our eyes without tears.<sup>136</sup>

Her language is full of weather metaphors, but is bereft of any direct reference to her daughter.

In her text, Albret describes the same tearless scene, without the meteorological imagery:

Mes yeulx, craignant trop de larmes respandre,  
Ont bien osé sur ma bouche entreprendre,  
Luy deffendant le pleurer et l'adieu,  
Se departant du tant regretté lieu. (Letter II, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 12)

Afraid to shed too many tears, my eyes  
dared to take control of my mouth,  
forbidding it to cry or say goodbye,  
when leaving such a beloved place.

The daughter obviously suffers at this parting as well, calling into question those who interpret

Albret's letters as the writings of an uncaring daughter anxious to return to her husband.

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<sup>135</sup> For clarity, I have decided to identify these letters using numbers different than those in Abel Lefranc's edition. Two known manuscript copies exist of the exchange found in the manuscript collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Lefranc's numbering and chronological order is based on MS 24.298, while most Jeanne d'Albret scholars accept Félix Frank's chronology based on MS 883. I have adopted Felix's chronology and have ordered the letters according to MS 883, not MS 24.298. Letter I in this study refers to the first letter written from Marguerite to Jeanne after their separation at Cauterets in May 1549. For the in-text citations, letters will be identified by number, correspondents, as well as Lefranc's page numbers to avoid any confusion.

<sup>136</sup> Although Albret's writes in sixteenth-century French, her language is generally easy to understand for the reader of modern French. However, in this verse exchange, Albret and her mother's French is complicated by the poetic form. Accordingly, I have provided translations in order to clarify my interpretations of Albret's and Marguerite de Navarre's poetry. The translations of the excerpts from the poetic exchange are mine.

Furthermore, Albret specifically cites mother and daughter as the actors in this emotionally charged scene:

Sans ung adieu et piteuse harengue,  
Là où la main me servira de langue,  
Pour declairer la douleur trop amere  
Que sent la fille à l'adieu de la mere,  
Perdant du tout de parler la puissance,  
Tant empesché par trop grande abondance  
De pleurs, touz prestz des yeulx dehors sortir. (Letter II, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 12)

Without a goodbye or pitiful harangue,  
There where my hand served as my tongue,  
to declare the bitter pain  
That a daughter feels as she leaves her mother,  
Losing all power to speak,  
So prevented by too great a number  
of restrained tears that were so close to leaving my eyes.

This separation was obviously monumental for both Albret and her mother. Both of their renditions of the parting scene focus on their inability to speak or cry—a silent parting. Their writing incorporates many references to the emotional “weakness” traditionally attributed to women during this era. These references actually frame their stoic goodbye in socially acceptable terms. The remainder of the exchange serves to remedy this silence, as mother and daughter in turn profusely express their unspoken “feminine” sentiments.

However, the separation of Jeanne and Marguerite is not all that is at stake in these letters. The silence depicted in their first letters is partially filled with maternal and filial sentiment, but Albret adds a new dimension to the correspondence—that of longing for her husband. I will argue that Albret’s conjugal longing, as expressed in her writing, causes the daughter to glance away from the mother mirror, leaving Marguerite unsatisfied. Marguerite in turn tries to participate in Albret’s conjugal longing in order to remedy the lack caused by receiving only a portion of her daughter’s love. Marguerite attempts to win back the daughter

image by which she defines herself through imposing violent emotion on her daughter. Through the course of the letters, I posit that Marguerite attempts to reverse Albret's move toward independence. Albret resists her mother's attempts to reincorporate her fully into the mother mirror. She ultimately transcends Marguerite's folly and successfully divides her affection between her mother and husband, while, in the letters at least, remaining independent of both.

The first indication of Albret's foray outside the mother-daughter mirror in these letters occurs when Albret links maternal love to filial duty:

O dur morceau malaisé à gouter  
A vous et moy ! Que l'amour maternelle,  
Qui sans finer me sera si cruelle,  
Ne peult ce mot de triste adieu souffrir !  
Je ne vous puis, Madame, rien offrir :  
Je suis à vous et en vostre puissance,  
Asseurez-vous que ceste obeissance,  
Que je vous doibz, si bien observeray  
Que mon debvoir en cela je feray. (Letter II, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 13)

O, bitter morsel of anguish to taste  
for you and me ! That maternal love,  
a love that perpetually will be so cruel to me,  
Could not bear this sad goodbye!  
Madame, I cannot offer you any solace:  
I am yours and in your power,  
Be assured that this obedience,  
That I owe you, is so well observed  
That, in this, I fulfill my duty.

In this passage, Albret perceives Marguerite's love as oppressive. The daughter frankly admits that she cannot cure her mother's pain. Since Albret cannot cure Marguerite's despair with her own filial love, this passage posits maternal love as a source of guilt. Albret makes it clear that she is doing all she can—all that duty to her mother requires—but through this discussion of duty, she also acknowledges her emotional limits. Albret, as a daughter, cannot participate in/replicate Marguerite's maternal longing. Maternal love holds Albret "in its power," yet Albret

resists this power by linking maternal love to filial duty. Although in the logic of the mother-daughter mirror, the daughter expresses love through fulfilling her duty to her mother, this letter subtly calls this system into question by emphasizing that filial duty does not and cannot successfully mirror maternal love. The letter implies that fulfilling filial duty will never be enough to satisfy maternal love, and rightly so, for, outside the mirror, duty and love are parallel emotions, especially in familial and marital politics of the sixteenth-century. This linkage echoes the earlier marriage protest when Jeanne reluctantly fulfilled her duty by consenting to a marriage (physically) forced on her by Marguerite. Love for her husband or her parents is nowhere to be found in Albret's marriage protest. Albret exploits the tenets of familial law and duty in this instance to diminish her mother's "power" over her emotional life by questioning the validity of the mirror economy.

As the letter continues, Albret reveals another reason for her inability to completely fill the silence described so intricately by mother and daughter—conjugal love. Albret's duty to her mother—to gaze incessantly into the mother-daughter mirror—is checked by her emotional link to her husband. She divides her emotional life between filial and conjugal love. Albret states that conjugal love entreats her to be patient, "*Me promectant l'agreable plaisance / Et le plaisir de reveoir ung mary*" ("promising me agreeable pleasure, and the joy of seeing my husband again") (Letter II, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 13). Whereas Marguerite's love causes guilt and leaves Albret feeling unsatisfied, conjugal love brings hope of restoring Albret's self-worth. Jensen observes,

While the daughter's psychic specificity could be apprehended in any number of areas, her relationship to her husband brings her potential self-distinction from her mother closest to the surface. Marriage, by moving the daughter from her mother's jurisdiction to her husband's, functions as a structural crack in the mirror, demanding that the daughter more or less actively negotiate some sort of relationship to her husband and her wifely duties. My work on mother-daughter relations in French women's writings

suggest that, as a general pattern and result of a highly sex-segregated, Catholic culture, the specter of a daughter's psychic autonomy comes into focus when she begins to desire a man or through her heterosexual activity, even when passively endured. (Jensen, "Mother-Daughter" 115)

This split in her affections/crack in the mirror allows her to eclipse her guilt and again diminishes her mother's power, as she acknowledges her own double longing:

Lors, obliant la trop facheuse absence,  
Je recepvray la joye et le plaisir  
Et joyray de mon parfaict desire  
D'ensemble veoir pere, mere, et mary  
Lors cessera mon cuer d'estre mar[r]y.  
Donc attendant ceste heureuse journée  
Je languiray de mal environnée,  
Ayant toujours de vous reveoir envie,  
Suppliant Dieu vous conserver la vie. (Letter II, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 14)

Now, forgetting the too troubling absence,  
I will receive joy and pleasure  
and will revel in my perfect desire  
to see father, mother, and husband together  
When my heart will cease to be sad.  
Thus, awaiting this happy day  
I will languish in these sad surroundings,  
Having always the desire to see you again,  
Praying to God to preserve your life.

At the end of her letter, Albret's fulfillment is not solely reliant on a reunion with her mother.

She is no longer exclusively speaking into the void of the past parting scene. Instead, she looks to the future, when she will enjoy her husband's and mother's presence simultaneously.

Surprisingly, she even mentions her father. Considering the strained relations between her mother and father, this comment seems to decrease Marguerite's significance in the proposed reunion, for, coupled with Henri d'Albret, Marguerite's importance as mother is secondary to her role as parent. Additionally, Albret plays with the future tense. In this excerpt, two futures are in play. A later future in which the family reunion will take place preceded by an earlier future in which Albret will languish awaiting the day that she sees her mother (vous) again. She is

canny, for she grants her mother's wish in the "earlier" future, while ultimately looking forward to a family reunion that includes her husband.

Albret's optimism and proposed family reunion stand in stark contrast to the impersonal conclusion of her mother's first letter:

A mes haultz cris s'acorde le tonner  
Par mes souspirs le vent faict partout guerre,  
Et ma complainte et lamantation  
Contrainct la gresle à faire emotion.  
.....  
Or, a le ciel faict declaration  
De la couverte et juste passion  
Que j'ay senty[e] à ce departement,  
En vous voiant, je n'avois sentement,  
Mais maintenant que je ne vous voy plus,  
m'en voys à Dieu luy dire le surplus.  
Luy suppliant que vous soit tout en tout<sup>137</sup> (Letter I, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 11)

The thunder joins my loud cries  
By my sighs the wind makes war everywhere  
And my complaint and lamentation  
Cause the hail to show emotion.  
.....  
But, the sky made a declaration  
Of the concealed and just passion  
that I felt at this parting,  
In seeing you, I did not have an idea,  
But now that I see you no more,  
I turn to God to tell him all of it.  
Asking Him for you to be the best in all things

In this passage, Marguerite expresses her sorrow at having lost her daughter-reflection, but instead of writing directly to Albret to remedy this silence, Marguerite converses with the thunder and wind and ultimately, God. When Marguerite uses "vous" in the last lines, she is either *describing* her daughter or including the "vous" in a prayer. In Marguerite's first letter, Albret is merely the distant daughter-object who is secondary to the mother's pain. Albret is no

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<sup>137</sup> Lefranc explains, "Que Dieu vous soit tout en tout : formule mystique chère à la reine de Navarre" (11, n. 2).

daughter-subject, merely a mirror through which the mother reinforces the value of maternal suffering.

I posit that these two letters are useful for interpreting the rest of the correspondence. Albret looks away from the mother-daughter mirror and in subsequent letters encourages her mother to do the same. Marguerite is very resistant and expresses her wish to remain involved in her daughter's life, insomuch as Albret serves as fuel for Marguerite's own suffering. As the exchange continues, the daughter is more resilient despite her continued separation from her husband. Marguerite, at times, yields to her daughter's self-differentiation, but only in an attempt to reclaim Albret's love for her own.

In her mother's response (Letter III), Marguerite writes less in metaphors and responds "positively" to Albret's hopefulness at the end of her first letter. Although Marguerite still does not use any "maternal/filial" terms, she relates more personally to the "vous" of her poem and addresses her daughter directly. The letter's content makes it clear that Marguerite depends on her daughter and lives through her daughter's life:

Mais en vivant en vous, je me consens  
De confesser que vostre mal je sens,  
Et vostre bien aussi me resjouit :  
Tant a mon cœur du bien et mal joui,  
Que vous portez pour moy dedans le vostre. (Letter III, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 17)

But, while living in you, I consent  
to confess that I feel your sorrow,  
And your happiness also makes me happy:  
So much has my heart experienced the good and bad,  
That you now carry it all in yours.

As Jourda comments, "c'est, avant la lettre, le « *J'ai mal à votre poitrine* » de Madame de Sévigné" (Jourda 334). As with Madame de Sévigné in her letters to her daughter, Marguerite appropriates Albret's emotional life as an extension of herself. Jensen remarks, "A mother, by



treating her daughter as a second self, by expecting her to fulfill maternal wishes rather than have any of her own, would not be able to recognize the daughter as a person in her own right”

(“Mother-Daughter” 111). In these lines, Marguerite allows Albret no independent emotional life. Albret is simply the vessel that carries her mother’s emotional legacy.

Jourda comments that in this letter Marguerite actually tries to comfort her daughter, but by appropriating her daughter’s emotions as her own, I would posit that Marguerite simply consoles herself. After all, through metaphoric speech, the mother describes her own troubled emotional state, and she emphasizes how Albret’s letter comforts *her*:

Contentez-vous que le ciel par pleuvoir  
Tonner, gresler, ayt faict nostre ennuy veoir.  
Et ceste nuict la terre a fort tremblé,  
Voiant tel mal dessus elle asemblé,  
Comme disant « Je ne puis plus porter ».  
Mais aujourd’huy pour me reconforter  
M’avez escript une si bonne epistre,  
Voiant l’espoir que commencez au tiltre  
De me reveoir, . . .  
.....  
Cest espoir là esperé fermement  
A essuyé mes yeulx joyeusement,  
Et de mon cueur a chassé la tristesse, (Letter III, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 17-18)

Be content that the sky by rain  
thunder, hail, has made our sorrow visible.  
And this night the earth shook,  
seeing the sorrow that assembled above it,  
As if to say, “I can no longer carry it.”  
But today to comfort me  
You have written such a nice letter,  
Seeing the hope that begins with the idea  
of you seeing me again, . . .  
.....  
This wished-for hope  
wiped my eyes joyously,  
and chased sorrow from my heart,

To complete her emotional appropriation, Marguerite even states, “*notre ennuy*” (our sorrow) and narcissistically expresses longing for the missing daughter-mirror-object—“*de me reveoir*.”

In this letter, maternal emotion reverses the stoic goodbye of Marguerite's first letter.

Marguerite uses it to rejoin Albret's emotional life with her own. Albret's mother dispenses with her son-in-law and husband and transforms her daughter's desire for a family reunion into an exclusively mother-daughter reunion.

Sight also returns in this letter. In the first letter, Marguerite acknowledges that her pain began when she lost sight of her daughter-mirror, and in this letter, realizing that Albret can only partially fill the silence left between them at their parting, sight is the only remaining restorative measure. Marguerite will continue to suffer until Albret is fully restored to her. Jensen states:

According to the logic of maternal narcissism, it is virtually impossible for a mother to acknowledge a daughter's possible psychic autonomy because the daughter has been constructed as the mother's self-extension. As such, the daughter's potential self-assertion, her divergence from maternal desires, can only threaten and wound the maternal ego. ("Mother-Daughter" 113)

Albret's gaze transfers to her husband, and Marguerite seeks to shore up her own "maternal ego." Until the longed-for reunion, if Albret cannot channel her entire emotional life towards her mother, Marguerite resolves to participate in her daughter's conjugal sentiment from afar:

Et aussi tot que vostre œil et son œil  
S'assembleront, je n'auray plus de dueil,  
Car de voz cueurs, je les tiens tant uniz,  
De vray amour et de vertu garniz,  
Que ce n'est qu'un ; et avec[ques] ces deux  
Le mien loger pour tout jamais je veulx,  
Non pour garder l'un l'autre d'aprocher,  
Mais le[ur] servir du'un lien ferme et cher. (Letter III, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 18)

And as soon as your eye and his eye  
Come together, I will no longer mourn,  
Because of your hearts, I hold your loves so unified,  
By true love and virtue adorned,  
That there is only one; and with these two  
I want mine to stay forever  
Not to keep one from approaching the other  
But to serve them as a strong and dear link.

Once again, Marguerite emphasizes sight. She is not interested in reinforcing or vicariously experiencing Albret's longing for her husband here. Instead, she specifies the moment when the two will be reunited—a moment when Albret will see herself in Antoine's eyes as his wife, not as Marguerite's daughter. For Jourda, who reads Albret as an uncaring daughter, this means that "Elle [Marguerite] a compris qu'elle ne peut plus occuper le premier rang dans les affections de sa fille : elle ne demande plus qu'une petite place dans son cœur" (334). However, Marguerite inserts herself in the moment of reunion between husband and wife. These lines seem to entreat Albret never to privilege one love over the other—to keep an eye toward the mother-daughter mirror. Marguerite does not want to keep Albret from her husband, but she does not want her to love him completely. Some of Albret's affection must be channeled toward Marguerite because of Marguerite's investment in the mirror.

Albret's response returns to themes of parting once more.<sup>138</sup> In this letter, Albret recounts a sad scene of farewell reproducing her mother's meteorological metaphors:

A ce matin, Madame, j'ay reçu  
 En grand plaisir votre epistre bien leue,  
 Mais me faisant souvenir de l'adieu  
 A tous ennuyes certes j'ay donné lieu,  
 Et si le ciel retarde de pleuvoir,  
 Pour ne me veoir aux yeulx la larme avoir,  
 Je vous diray pourquoy cela advint:  
 C'est qu'à l'adieu d'un « Dieu gard » me souvint

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<sup>138</sup> Evidence that this is a response is that this letter echoes Marguerite's weather imagery, whereas Letter II does not. One issue with claiming that Albret's first letter (Letter II) is not a response to Marguerite's letter (Letter I) is that both are in the same format. These letters are written in verse, *décasyllabes* of *rime riche* (or *rime suffisante*) and a rhyme scheme of *rime plate*. One could argue that Albret would have read Marguerite's letter before composing her own in the same format. Certainly, this could not have been a coincidence, but considering that this is the most significant correspondence we have between mother and daughter, perhaps this writing style was an agreement between them before their parting. Apparently, Marguerite used this style to write to several correspondents. In Ruble's work, there are letters written to Henry II and the Abbess of Fontevault in the same style. There is also the possibility that not all of the letters in this exchange were preserved. "Il faut admettre que la correspondance versifiée, écho des sentiments de chacune, ne suffisait pas pour les détails positifs, & que chaque Epître poétique était doublée d'un billet en prose plus instructif" (Frank 53). Regardless, Jeanne's first two letters (Letters II & IV), have a decidedly different tone. The first, I believe to be Albret's own thoughts, and the second, Albret's incorporation of her mother's metaphors into something that reflected Albret's own style and sentiments.

Qui recrea mes pleurs, mais non obstant  
 N'effaca pas en mon cueur mal contant  
 Ce dur ennuy qu'à present me tourmente.  
 Et en tant que [je] vous trouvay absente,  
 Hier au soir, je me mis à plaindre ;  
 Lors Dieu voullut astres et ciel contraindre  
 Vous declairer mon mal dur à porter (Letter IV, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 15)

This morning, Madame, I received  
 With great pleasure your letter that I read,  
 But it made me think of our sad goodbye  
 Of which I am the reason,  
 And if the sky delays the rain,  
 in order to see no tear in my eyes,  
 I will tell you why this happens:  
 A "Dieu gard" reminds me of the goodbye  
 and will recreate my tears, but  
 not erase in my malcontent heart  
 This difficult worry that torments me at present.  
 Finding you absent,  
 Yesterday evening, I began to complain;  
 When God compelled the stars and the sky  
 to tell you my sorrows that are so hard to bear

Albret's guilt is evident in this passage. She is the cause of her mother's pain, but Albret acknowledges that she is suffering from her mother's absence as well. Although she frames her complaint in the context of her mother's metaphoric imagery and refers to her sadness at her mother's absence, Albret is also missing her husband. I read "Ce dur ennuy qu'à present me tourmente" as her husband's absence. Both mother and daughter make it clear in their earlier letters that they did not cry at their leave-taking, yet here, amidst talk of sad partings, Albret states, "C'est qu'à l'adieu d'un « Dieu gard » me souvint / Qui recrea mes pleurs. . ." The union of tears and a parting can only reference Albret and Antoine's separation. She then continues with the surprising, "Et en tant que [je] vous trouvay absente, / Hier au soir, je me mis à plaindre ;". At first, it seems as if Albret complains about her mother's absence, but as the poem continues, she wants to complain about her husband's absence, "mon mal dur à porter." Albret

is not looking for an empathetic mother mirror. She emphasizes that she suffers *on her own*—not from guilt-induced maternal longing, but from conjugal love.

In the conclusion, the ambiguous “cest adieu” reinforces the possibility that Albret laments her husband’s absence in this letter:

Je prie à Dieu qui nous peult conforter  
Me faire veoir vostre centiesme année.  
En attendant ceste heureuse journée,  
Que le « Dieu gard’ » me fera autant rire  
Que cest adieu m’a causé de martire,  
Je vous supplie estre de moy contente  
Et me tenir la plus obeissante  
Fille, qui fut et qui jamais sera,  
Tant [qu’]en ce corps l’ame demeurera. (Letter IV, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 16)

I pray to God who can comfort us  
to allow me to see your hundredth year  
Waiting for this happy day  
May the “Dieu gard” give me as much laughter  
As this goodbye caused me pain  
I ask you to be content with me  
And know that I am the most obedient  
Daughter who was and who will ever be  
As long as my soul stays in this body.

The last time Albret mentioned obedience was in the context of her inadequacy to alleviate her mother’s suffering. As I have shown, Albret frames this inadequacy in the parallel concepts of filial duty and love in order to weaken her mother’s emotional “power.”<sup>139</sup> The register is different here. Through the optimistic reversal of a sad goodbye (with her mother and/or her husband), Albret no longer posits herself as ineffectual or as “in her mother’s power.” In fact, she asks her mother to be satisfied with her, for she has managed to find happiness, even in her present sorrow. Albret’s recourse to duty eases the guilt invoked earlier in the letter. She gazes away from the mother-daughter mirror and focuses on her vision of a happier future. Albret

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<sup>139</sup> See page 98.

invites Marguerite to share in this vision, yet, judging by Marguerite's next letter, it only serves to threaten Marguerite and her maternal "ego."

Marguerite is sleeping peacefully when *Amour* wakes her up and demands,

. . . «Escriptz et prens la plume en main,  
Sans t'excuser ny attendre à demain.  
Prendre ne peult ta fille en passience  
Ceste trop longue et facheuse sillance. » (Letter V, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 26)

Write and take pen in hand,  
Without reluctance or waiting until tomorrow  
Your daughter cannot take with patience  
this too long and annoying silence.

Critics read this as Marguerite writing to console her daughter because Antoine is absent, yet there is no direct mention of Albret's husband.<sup>140</sup> I believe that Marguerite describes the silence between mother and daughter as well. Here, *Amour* could be the *amour maternel* that Albret previously cited as the source of her suffering.<sup>141</sup> This is especially so since the last lines reveal Marguerite's only hope to be her daughter's return:

Mais m'en revins en ma chambre courant  
Avecques eulx criant : « Helas ! mon Dieu  
Ramene tost en ce desolé lieu  
Celle que tant ciel et terre regrette,  
Et que revoir incessamment souhaite. » (Letter V, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 27)

But, running back to my room  
Crying with them : "Alas! my God  
Bring back soon to this desolate place  
She who the sky and the earth miss,  
And who wish constantly to see her again."

Antoine is nowhere to be found in this wish. If Marguerite wrote to console Albret's sorrow due to an absent husband, one would think Marguerite's closing wish would be for the reunion of

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<sup>140</sup> Jourda writes, ". . . L'Amour, lui apparaissant en songe, était venu l'engager à écrire à la princesse tant que celle-ci n'aurait pas rejoint le duc de Vendôme, car les lettres de sa mère lui étaient une consolation" (334).

<sup>141</sup> See page 98.

husband and wife (or at least the entire family together). However, in the lines of the poem, Antoine is not present. At the end, Marguerite only wishes for Albret. She does not console Albret's pain. In fact, she seeks relief from her own, in the form of her daughter's return. For whatever reason, this letter has no response, and another of Marguerite's follows.

In the next letter, Marguerite regrets that Albret is alone with no one to guide her:

Si vostre tant regretté partir  
S'est faict de moy à force consentir,  
Me remonstrant le grant plaisir qu'avoir  
Vous esper[i]ez de vostre mary veoir,  
tant que croyois vostre contentement,  
De mon ennuy couvrir le sentiment ;  
Puis je pensois qu'avec vous vostre pere  
Deust achever ce voiage prospere ;  
Mais maintenant que le contraire voy  
Et que je suis sans vous et vous sans moi,  
Vous sans mary et sans pere et sans guide,  
Je ne voy plus ny raison ny remede,  
Qui engarder me puisse de me plaindre.  
Car vray amour ne se scait pas bien faindre. (Letter VI, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 20)

If your departure that I was  
forced to consent to,  
allowed me the great pleasure and  
hope of you seeing your husband again,  
I could conceal my emotion;  
When I thought that with you your father  
would achieve this prosperous voyage;  
But now that the opposite has happened  
And I am without you and you without me  
You without husband and without father and without guide,  
I don't see any reason or remedy  
That can keep me from complaining.  
Because true love does not know how to pretend

When Marguerite writes, "Et que je suis sans vous et vous sans moi," the mother-daughter mirror is reproduced in poetry and revolves around the conjunction "et." Albret's physical absence from Marguerite has no power to extinguish the intensity of her mother's *amour maternel*. Marguerite does not use a similar structure to refer to Albret's absent husband and father.

Antoine and Henri are also far from Albret, but, in their case, Marguerite does not complete the mirror: “Vous sans mary et sans pere et sans guide.” Only the mother and daughter have access to the mirror, and once again, Antoine is excluded. Accordingly, this letter acknowledges Marguerite’s dependence on Albret:<sup>142</sup>

Donc ne treuvant nulle autre amour egale  
Fors seulement la vostre filliale,  
Je ne me puis garder de vous escrire  
Mon purgatoire et trop cruel martire.  
O sottie main, o mere par trop folle !  
Fault-il qu’ainsi ta fille tu consolles ! (Letter VI, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 21)

Thus, not finding another love equal  
to your daughterly love,  
I cannot keep myself from writing you  
about my purgatory and cruel pain.  
Oh foolish hand, oh crazy mother!  
Is it like this that you console your daughter!

Her writing becomes much more personal here for an instant. She admits her folly and acknowledges that her daughter is the only one who can console her. Marguerite then spends several lines of text admonishing herself and her *amour maternel* using “tu.”

Diminuant ta forte passion,  
Donner luy veulx la desolation  
Que tu luy doibz de ton pouvoir oster.  
Vault-il pas mieux toute seulle gouster  
L’amer morceau de ceste departie,  
Que luy laisser ceste seure partie ?  
Scais-tu pas bien que si son dueil augmente,  
Tu en seras doublement mal contente ?  
Scais tu pas bien qu’en accroissant son dueil,  
Tu en feras cent foys pleurer son œil ;  
Et, qui pis est, tes larmes ne tes cris,  
Tes piteux motz, ne tes dolens escriptz,  
Ne feront pas que la fortune change  
Ne que par pleurs a ton vouloir se renge.

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<sup>142</sup> Albret’s response must have been lost or not have existed, considering two consecutive letters from Marguerite exist in MS 883. Frank believes that a that was not preserved existed between these two letters that indicated some hardship in Albret’s life. See note 138.



Tu ne ferois seulement qu'engraver  
Le dueil au cueur et le corps trop grever. (Letter VI, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 21)

Lessening your strong passion,  
Distance this distress  
That you have in your strength to remove.  
Is it better to taste all alone  
The bitter morsel of this parting,  
That allowed this sister to part?  
Don't you know well that if her mourning increases,  
You will be doubly unhappy?  
Don't you know well that in increasing her suffering,  
You will make her eye cry a hundred times;  
And, what's worse, her tears nor her cries,  
Your pitiful words, nor your sad writings,  
Will not make fortune change  
Nor by tears your desire be realized.  
You only engrave  
mourning in the heart and the exhausted body.

Marguerite acknowledges that her letter will redouble Albret's guilt and pain, but she cannot stop herself from lamenting her daughter's absence. In this section, Marguerite is writing the wished-for scenario in hopes that her replaying of the mother-daughter separation script will once again channel her daughter's emotional energy toward Marguerite. In this passage, Marguerite actually recreates Albret in her own image—alone, crying, and in sorrow. She then abandons this personal moment of folly, and the discussion turns again to God and becomes impersonal once more. She resorts to spiritual reflection and commends her daughter to God's care:

Doncques pour vous, ma fille, je le prie,  
Et du profond de mon cueur je luy [Dieu] crie  
Le suppliant vous estre pere et mere,  
Mary, amy. . . . (Letter VI, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 21)

Thus for you, my daughter, I ask Him,  
And from the bottom of my heart I cry to Him  
Asking him to be your father and mother,  
Husband, friend. . . .

She distances herself from her daughter by emphasizing that God will now serve all the roles of those who would give Albret counsel. Her plea is not convincing, for as Marguerite continues her discourse, she offers the following advice to her daughter, serving as a moral guide and echoing the mother evoked by Albret in her marriage refusal:

Et le plaisir de ma joye premiere,  
Par qui j'acquis le nom de mere heureuse,  
En me donnant fille très vertueuse.  
Telle vous veulx ; ou plustost vous veoir morte  
Que de vous [veoir] nommer d'[une] autre sorte. (Letter VI, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 22)

And the pleasure of my first joy,  
By whom I acquired the name, happy mother,  
In giving me a very virtuous daughter.  
Just how I want you ; I'd rather see you dead  
than see you called something else.

Marguerite advises Albret from afar and encourages her daughter to show a good public face.

Albret must reflect positively on Marguerite. For her mother, if her daughter cannot channel her mother's wishes properly, Albret is not an effective means of affirming the mother's identity.

Marguerite's sole concern in this letter is that Albret remains a faithful daughter-object-mirror.

If Albret fails to fulfill that role, then she is of no use to her mother. Surprisingly, Marguerite offers hope of a reunion with both her daughter and son-in-law at the end of this letter:

Je le requiers de par son crucifix,  
Qu'avec ma fille il renvoye mon filz,  
Et que tous deux en santé plains de joye,  
Avant mourir de ces deux yeulx revoye. (Letter VI, Marguerite to Jeanne, Lefranc 22)

I request by his crucifix,  
That with my daughter he sends my son,  
And that both in health and full of joy,  
Before dying, these two eyes will see.

Marguerite does not want to see her daughter alone, for she realizes that without Antoine, Albret will be miserable and completely inattentive. She revises her earlier wish for an exclusively

mother-daughter reunion to include Antoine, so that her daughter, having her husband with her, will not be distracted by his absence.

In the last letter of the series, Albret steps definitively outside of the mirror, rejecting her mother's intense emotions and narcissistic optimism. Albret's response speaks of future hope, although she admits that in the present, she is not so happy:

Et le present me monstre triste face,  
Où je ne sçay trouvery plaisir ne grace ;  
Car l'advenir, duquel bonheur j'espere,  
Me promet bien faire meilleure chere. (Letter VII, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 24)

And the present shows me a sad face,  
Where I don't know how to find pleasure nor grace;  
Because the future, of which happiness I hope,  
Promises to be so much better.

Albret's use of "le present me monstre triste face" evokes mirroring once again. Her husband's absence and her mother's suffering combine, and indeed, in this image, Albret is an image of her sorrowful mother. However, Albret wishes for a better future, even if it does bring more hardship. In order to arrive at this wished for time, Albret politely requests her mother to cease her dramatic musings:

Mais quoy! je fault par trop d'affection,  
Car vostre mal est forte passion ;  
N'a plus besoing qu'elle soit augmentée  
Et trop plus a Madame tourmentée. (Letter VII, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 24)

But what! I fault for too much affection,  
Because your fault is strong passion;  
There is no need for it to increase  
and torment Madame much more.

The original source of Albret's guilt was her mother's suffering, for the daughter cannot match maternal devotion through filial duty. In the previous letter, Marguerite rekindled her lamenting to a boiling point, and in this letter, Albret finally expresses discontent with her mother's lack of emotional control. Her mother's excessive emotion torments *Madame* (Marguerite), not Albret,

in this passage. Albret's guilt fades, as she acts as the voice of reason asking her mother to stop torturing herself. Albret refuses to take further part in her mother's suffering, thus extricating herself from the endless suffering contained within the mother-daughter mirror.

She then offers her mother comfort once again, using Marguerite's own images, yet placing them in the context of a familiar saying. One might say Albret is taking the distance out of her mother's images, to call her mother back to her senses:

Parquoy vous fault, ou bien par esperance,  
Ou seureté, prandre rejouissance.  
Vous sçavez bien qu'aux proverbes des vieulx  
On dict souvent qu'après temps pluvieux,  
Le cler soleil se monstre en sa beaulté. (Letter VII, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 24)

Why fault you, instead by hope,  
Or assurance, rediscover joy.  
You know well that in the old proverbs  
We say often that after rainy weather,  
The sun shines beautifully.

Marguerite's despair wears on Albret, and using her mother's own weather imagery, Albret ends her mother's metaphoric discourse of suffering with one line: "Le cler soleil se monstre sa beaulté."

The following verses continue Albret's hopeful discourse in an aside addressed to everyone who experiences sorrow. This aside differs from Marguerite's in the previous letter; her mother used "tu" to admonish herself and to recast Albret as a reflection of her suffering mother. Albret offers advice to Marguerite based on her own experience in her aside:

Tous mes escriptz n'ont tousjours esté faulx,  
Et cestuy-cy sera bien veritable,  
Faisant servir mon malheur importable,  
Lequel tant plus gratieulx me tourmente,  
Tant plus l'esperoir me console et contente.  
.....  
Attendez-donc, Madame, ce remede  
Qui vous sera tel secours et tel ayde,

Que vous direz croyant ce mien langage :  
« Vrayment un fol conseille bien un saige ». (Letter VII, Jeanne to Marguerite, Lefranc 24-25)

All my writings are not always false,  
And this one will surely be true,  
in addressing my unbearable sadness,  
The more it torments me,  
Hope consoles and contents me that much more.

.....  
Wait then, Madame, for this remedy  
That will be for you such help,  
That you will say believing my words :  
“Truly a fool can counsel a sage very well.”

Albret plays the age and respect card here and refers to herself as the “fol” (hapless daughter) who offers advice (although Albret is clearly the voice of reason) and to her mother as the “saige.” Albret, the inexperienced daughter, counsels her experienced mother. This letter’s closing portrays the daughter as superior to her mother in emotional maturity. Albret is wise enough to distill meaning from her mother’s emotional complaints, and she recycles that meaning into hope. Marguerite’s letters are not hopeful (except what she gleans from her daughter); they reference fortune and God, and the human inability to change their fate. Albret’s, on the other hand, manifest hope in the sense that the future will be better, even if the present is bleak, resisting the mother-daughter mirror.

In this brief mother-daughter exchange, Albret shows her startling ability to adapt. She questions her mother’s actions. She reverses Marguerite’s attempts to control her emotional life—subversively, through recourse to duty and on the surface through optimism tinged with reproval. Albret even adapts her mother’s imagery in order to show that there is no need for such despair when a reunion is imminent. Ultimately, Albret’s extensive use of Marguerite’s “language” is not a sign of a daughter’s subordination to her mother. Rather, Albret speaks in her mother’s “language” in order to break through Marguerite’s masochistic suffering with a

retelling of their story. Reversing her mother's stormy metaphors with a bright sky, Albret presents herself as a daughter-subject who rejects/reverses maternal suffering with hope.

Marguerite's last entry in this exchange relies on that hope, evidencing that Albret does not mirror her mother's suffering; rather, she invites her mother to look away from the mirror.

Jourda comments,

L'affection inquiète et tourmentée de la Reine y perce sans cesse. Jeanne ne paraît pas y répondre avec beaucoup de chaleur. Elle aime sa mère, mais moins ardemment qu'on le voudrait. Toutes proportions gardées, on songe, en lisant ces épîtres, à celles qu'échangèrent, plus tard, Madame de Sévigné, et sa fille, et l'on éprouve même impression : Jeanne raisonne comme Mme de Grignan, elle ne sent pas. (335-336)

Jourda portrays Albret as the heartless and cold daughter, who abandons her mother on the eve of her death. If the sympathy for Marguerite is removed from the equation, it becomes clear that Jourda, along with Roelker, does not acknowledge that this correspondence reflects Albret's growing independence. The poetic exchange informs how she manages her own identity in later texts after she has become both mother and queen. I will show that Albret's experience of the mother-daughter mirror, and the independence she gained from escaping it, are in dialogue with her later literary endeavors as widowed queen mother. However, another obstacle stood between Albret and emotional independence—her husband, Antoine de Bourbon.

Shortly after, December 21, 1549, Marguerite died, and Albret began her journey as wife and mother. Albret had several children, but only two survived infancy, Catherine de Bourbon, and Albret's son, the famous Henri IV of France. By the time Albret becomes a mother, her identity is tied up in that of her husband. She has replicated her mother's susceptibility to the male influences around her, and instead of relying on the mother-mirror, she relies on Antoine to shore up her identity. Antoine, like Albret's father, was an unfaithful husband, and Albret was a jealous wife. Although few of Albret's letters to Antoine survive, most critics intuit Albret's

feelings from Antoine's responses and characterize her as emotionally dependent on her husband.<sup>143</sup>

One letter in particular implies that Albret replicates Marguerite's maternal suffering script and at one point is so emotionally unstable that she causes everyone around her to suffer as well. At the death of her first son in 1553, Albret was understandably upset, but according to Antoine, her grief grew into an obsession: "My dear, you know how often I have told you that it is your natural tendency to torment your husband and all who love you. It seems to me that from now on you should try to overcome it, because it will bring nothing but shame to your servants and pain to your husband" (qtd. in Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 95). Albret might have continued this way if not for factors that directed her energy into the public sphere and away from private affairs: her father's death, Protestantism, and Antoine's death. Maternal depictions in her writings after these events evidence Albret's move past dependence to autonomy.

### **The Protestant French Queen**

After her father's death on May 29, 1555, Albret and Antoine assumed the throne, and her perspective changed. Now, she, along with Antoine, was responsible for her subjects. This

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<sup>143</sup> At this point, I have to acknowledge a lacunae in Albret's oeuvre that for the most part renders the personal details of her married life a complete mystery. There is only one known letter written from Albret to her second husband, Antoine de Bourbon. However in the Rochambeau collection, many of Antoine's letters to Albret are preserved, and critics like Nancy Roelker have chosen to intuit Albret's sentiments from Antoine's responses. Her second marriage to Antoine de Bourbon would test her independence according to Nancy Roelker. From these responses, Roelker accepts that Albret was incredibly dependent on Antoine, and it was her husband who kept her in check with his responses. See *Queen of Navarre*, chapter 3, especially p. 95.

Since I have chosen to explore how Albret writes her own experience, then these suppositions have little bearing on the present study. However, Roelker's assumptions do provide a point of contrast to Albret's life after the separation from and subsequent death of her husband. Additionally, details of her years as dutiful wife are less vital to my argument than those when she began to separate from Antoine, since I am essentially seeking the stages in Albret's move toward independence.

newfound responsibility accompanied her growing affinity for Protestantism. Albret writes in a 1555 letter to the Vicomte de Gourdon:<sup>144</sup>

Monsr le viscomte je vous escript la presente pour vous dire que jusques a maintenant j'ay esté sur les voyes de la defuncte Royne Madame ma tres honorée Mere que Dieu absolue au regard du doulte entre les Religions laquelle Royne induite par defunct son frere Monsieur le Roy françois premier de bonne et glorieuse memoire mon tres honoré Oncle, a ne se mettre en cervelle dogmes nouveaux ne se cuyda oncque que de Romans jovials, . . . ("Albret to Gourdon," Bryson 317)<sup>145</sup>

This statement lauds Marguerite as a "tres honoré Mere," while it undermines her memory with "doulte entre les Religions." Albret underscores that it is she, not her mother, who is the real advocate for the Protestant faith, because she no longer vacillates between the two.

In this letter, Albret blames her hesitation on Henri d'Albret and her submissive mother. She writes:

. . . outres plus me recordant toujours bien des noyses que loing auparavant le defunct Roy Mondsieur mon tres honoré Pere et Seigneur que Dieu tienne en grace rechercha alors que la ditte Royne faisant dans sa chambre prieres avecques les Ministres Roussel et Faarel quy d'eure sesquivereent en grand esmoy luy bailla un soufflet sur la jouë dextre & me tanisa de verges en deffendant asprement de ne se mesler de Doctrine, ce quy me cousta larmes ameres & ma retenue en treneur et complainte jusques a leurs trepas advenus & partant de present libre par la mort du susdit Monsieur Roy mon pere arrivèe deux mois. Exemples et semonces de ma cousine la Duchesse de Ferrare il mapparoist que la reforme est tant just & tant necesaire que j'estime a par moy que ce seroit couardise deloyale envers Dieu envers ma conscience et mon peuple de demourer plus longuement en suspend et perplexe . . . ("Albret to Gourdon," Bryson 317)

Of course there have been many writers who have attempted to gauge the sincerity of her Protestantism and those who have argued that it was simply a political tool that afforded women a stronger place in the world than Catholicism. Roelker comments,

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<sup>144</sup>Nicolas de Flotard, Vicomte de Gourdon. He and his son (of the same name) were Protestant leaders in the French Wars of Religion.

<sup>145</sup> Some critics have suggested that this and other letters written by Albret to the Vicomte de Gourdon are forgeries due to chronological discrepancies and possible embellishment by a transcriptionist. David Bryson has argued in his article, "The Vallant Letters of Jeanne d'Albret" (*French History*. 13.2. (1999) 161-186) and in *Queen Jeanne and the Promised Land* that the letters should not be dismissed as forgeries because there is not enough evidence to disregard the letters.



On the historical plane, therefore, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the phenomenon of the feminine Huguenot leaders was a result of the convergence of particular historical factors: a weakened crown permitted the growth of a strong minority party in the *haute noblesse*; the women of these privileged families exploited certain advantages enjoyed by their class – wealth, influence, a humanist education and a considerable degree of freedom – to express themselves and to assert leadership; because of its moral fervor and practical orientation, Calvinism presented noblewomen with new options for autonomy and self-development through social and political action in the real world, . . .” (“Role of Noblewomen” 108)

Additionally, Blaisdell comments,

Some, perhaps, found an opportunity for self-fulfillment in their otherwise confined and empty lives through the acquisition of power that came through patronage and control of a Reformed congregation in their lands. Direct, unmediated relationship with God without the intermediary role of a priest placed Calvinist women on an equal spiritual footing with all men. The Calvinist acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of the marriage relationship and reciprocal love between husband and wife undermined the traditional acceptance of the sexual double standard perpetrated by the Roman church. (68)

It was her choice to embrace Protestantism (for whatever reason), and in her writings it is clear that this choice changed Albret and gave her an outlet for self-expression.<sup>146</sup> In her writings after her conversion is made public, Albret is more confident than before. Her choice then enables her to operate independently from Antoine (she directs herself) and eventually leads to her role as autonomous queen. In order to articulate this phenomenon, I will examine Albret’s use of the maternal in the Protestant context before Antoine’s death and the mother figure in her political writing after his death.

Although Albret actively practiced her faith, she did not publicly declare herself a Protestant until December 25, 1560, in a move I deem more political than religious. After this date, Albret openly encouraged her subjects to embrace Protestantism—the queen’s religion

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<sup>146</sup> Although not present in this analysis, an examination of Marguerite’s private mysticism versus Albret’s public Protestantism certainly dialogues with the general theme of the daughter’s rejection of the mother.

became her subjects' law. Shortly after her conversion, in letters to Madame de Langey, Albret asserts her authority as queen in a manner befitting a "mother" of her subjects.

### **Mothering a "Subject"—Queen Jeanne d'Albret and Madame de Langey**

Through her letters, Albret chastises the Catholic Madame de Langey. Madame de Langey punishes her daughter, Catherine, for her Protestant leanings.<sup>147</sup> Madame de Langey will not change her views, and Albret demands that Catherine be sent right away. In the end, Madame de Langey acquiesces, and Albret adopts Catherine. Critics like Roelker and Rochambeau view this episode as a testament to Albret's interest in proselytizing. After all, Albret tried proselytizing even with those above her station, including young King Charles IX.<sup>148</sup>

I believe the letters show that Albret may have had another reason for adopting Madame de Langey's daughter—one that had less to do with religion and more to do with Albret's own needs. She identifies with Madame de Langey's daughter's plight, and she supports Catherine's right to disobey her parents. Madame de Langey, for Albret, recalls her own experience with Marguerite and her father. In her letter dated October 3, 1561, Albret takes personal offense at Madame de Langey's actions with her daughter:

. . . je m'en suis de ma part la plus offensée du monde, ne pouvant penser qu'en une mère ayant eu d'un si homme de bien et mary une si bonne et vertueuse fille, il fust en vostre puissance de luy démonstrer telle inhumanité et cruauté comme tous ceux qui en parlent le publient à votre merveilleuse déréputation. (Letter CLXIV, Jeanne to Madame de Langey, Rochambeau 241)

Albret's description of Madame de Langey and Catherine seem to echo portraits of herself and her mother in earlier writings. Whatever her motives, Albret clearly "mothers" one of her subjects in her letters to Langey. Based on her authority as queen, she intervenes in the mother-daughter relationship and makes herself the adoptive mother.

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<sup>147</sup> In the Rochambeau collection, only Albret's side of the correspondence was published.

<sup>148</sup> See Roelker *Queen of Navarre* 171.

Albret continues her criticism and completely undermines Langey's maternal authority in the name of Protestantism. Her husband, Martin du Bellay, died in 1559, and Langey raised her daughter. Albret invokes her own religion to overstep Langey's power and faults Catherine's mother for failing to indulge her daughter's Protestant leanings:

Pour à quoy remédier, j'ay bien voulu, ma cousine, vous exorter de dire franchement que si la cause seule de la Religion qu'elle tient est occasion de vous avoir ainsi esmeüe et irritée sur elle, il faut que vous pensiez que la force de la parole de Dieu tranchante des deux cotés a telle vertu qu'elle sépare le père d'avec les enfans, le mary d'avec la femme, ne reconnoissant rien du monde quand il est question de servir purement à la gloire de celui qui nous a dit : « que celui qui aime plus son père et sa mère que luy n'est point digne de luy : » (Letter CLXIV, Jeanne to Madame de Langey, Rochambeau 241)

*“La mère d'avec les enfans”* and *“la parole de Jeanne”* could easily be substituted here. Albret writes that God separates fathers from children and husbands from wives, even as she endeavors to separate Langey from her daughter. Her own troubled relationship with her ambitious father and her mother could not have been far from her memory. In a second letter dated October 1561, Albret emphasizes that it is not the law of the mother and father that matter. She is independent of this law and claims to follow something higher, the religion she has chosen:

. . . .vous sçavez bien que l'obéissance des pères et des mères ne s'étend point de faire pour eux contre Dieu ce que la conscience juge : ce qui me fait esbahir que pour cela vous luy ayez usé de si étrange façon que porte même votre lettre. . . .  
(Lettre CLXV, Jeanne to Madame de Langey, Rochambeau 243)

In the same letter, Albret requests that Catherine come to live with her: “. . . .je vous prie me l'envoyer, vous assurant que j'en ay de fort bonne maison, fille mesmes de père et de mère contraires à nostre Religion, qui néantmoins, laissent leur fille avec moy selon leur conscience” (Letter CLXV, Jeanne to Madame de Langey, Rochambeau 244). Langey had no choice. This request was a thinly veiled demand. Roelker comments, “Jeanne's dealings with Madame de Langey illustrate the power of the great nobles over those dependent on them. Highly placed

persons, even members of the royal family, needed protection, and they paid for it by submitting to interference in their private lives” (*Queen of Navarre* 172).

The Protestant front enjoyed great successes in the months following this letter, but the upheaval in Albret’s personal life obviously was taking its toll.<sup>149</sup> By 1560, both Albret and Antoine had openly embraced the Protestant religion and encouraged its practice in their domains, but Antoine’s ambitions made him an easy target for the opposing Catholic faction. Antoine’s vacillation between the two religions and his many infidelities ultimately caused a schism between husband and wife. Additionally, his actions had removed the possibility that he might lead the French Huguenots.<sup>150</sup> Converting young Catherine had little political importance for Albret, for neither Catherine nor her widowed mother posed any sort of threat to Albret’s sovereignty. I propose that Catherine’s conversion allowed Albret to assert and to reaffirm personal independence and self-worth, since she had lost her husband’s emotional and political support.

Albret encourages Catherine to mirror her, not her own mother, and through Catherine, Albret realizes a victory. Her own daughter, born in 1559, was not yet old enough to appreciate her mother’s faith, and Albret may have been in sore need of a daughter-mirror to shore up her confidence. Nevertheless, in light of Jeanne’s earlier writings about/to her mother, this is a simplistic interpretation. The irony here is that Albret takes on the same role as Marguerite by

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<sup>149</sup> “The unremitting pressure of the Huguenots in the autumn of 1561 made it necessary for the crown to provide them with a new statute or legal framework defining their rights. . . . [the Edict of January 1562 authorized] for the first time Calvinist worship in public, . . . although qualified by hampering regulations” (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 172).

<sup>150</sup> “In the early months of 1561, Antoine ‘passed for chief of the reformers’ and was ‘surrounded by heretics,’ but at the same time he kept protesting his orthodoxy and attended Mass alternately with Protestant services” (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 157). “The prospect of Antoine leading the movement Jeanne had come to encourage had declined considerably in recent months. On May 14 the Venetian ambassador reported that he seemed increasingly inclined to the Catholic side, even boasting that he would carry his brother and his wife along with him. . . . The personal relationship between Antoine and Jeanne had also deteriorated in recent months . . . he was considered the chief playboy of the court” (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 160-161).

seeking a daughter-mirror in Catherine, yet Albret's investment in the mirror is quite different. Albret actually mothers both Langey and her daughter, replaying the political, familial script of her own experience. Duty, ever-present in Albret's letters to her mother and her marriage protest, reappears in this exchange, but the register is changed. Love, maternal or otherwise, is absent. In its place is a political/religious tug of war in which Albret poses as the superior "mother." Langey's duty, as Albret's social inferior, reduces her to a "daughter-object" who is forced to acquiesce to Albret's "queen mothering." Langey *must* give in, despite her opposition to Albret's terms. Unlike Albret's letters that undermine oppressive maternal love through obedience/duty, Langey has no recourse to her own emotional life, for Albret's power is absolute. As a "superior" mother, Albret claims Langey's daughter for her own and successfully enacts the mother-daughter mirror that failed for Marguerite; Catherine, a rebellious daughter, is and will remain a Protestant like Albret. Through serving as a surrogate mother, Albret rewrites her own life script—forced marriages, controlling parents—by enabling a daughter, Catherine de Langey, to escape from one mirror into another, more "palatable" one. Although all mother-daughter mirroring scenarios are decidedly negative costing one or both participants their identity, at least Albret offered Catherine de Langey a mirror that reflected Catherine's own religious leanings. Additionally, Albret abandons her own previous role as dutiful daughter and moves into the position of power within the mother-daughter mirroring scenario.

This small victory for Albret offered her comfort during the most difficult time of her marriage. She writes May 3, 1562, ". . . vous assurant que je n'ay fille près de moy en qui j'aye plus d'occasion me contenter" (Letter CLXXI, Jeanne to Madame de Langey, Rochambeau 251). With her husband siding with the Catholics and Albret realizing that the Protestant faith was

losing ground, Catherine must have been a great comfort to her.<sup>151</sup> Catherine's conversion not only provided Albret with a daughter-mirror, but gave her a chance to effectively exercise her authority as queen. She enforced her will upon one of her subjects in the guise of a concerned mother.

This kind of small, royal action is typical of Albret's reign, especially before her estrangement from Antoine and his subsequent death. She is a powerful queen, exercising her authority, but she ultimately relies on her husband for that authority. Even the critics comment on how she relied upon Antoine: "At first Albret was in the background, and even after her conversion, until the autumn of 1561, she ostensibly followed the lead of her husband" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 125). Rochambeau describes the change evidenced by letters written after her husband's death: "Enfin les lettres de Jehanne postérieures à la mort de son mari ; dans celles-ci surtout se révèle la supériorité du caractère de la reine de Navarre. C'est elle qui est le chef effectif des protestants, et tous les partis portent les yeux sur cette femme qui, à elle seule, fait trembler les plus redoutables capitaines et les politiques les plus consommés" (Rochambeau ix-x).

In the decade that followed her conversion, Albret's life changed dramatically, and she was left with little time to concern herself with converting individual subjects. Upon the death of her husband on November 17, 1562, Albret became the sole ruler of her domains. Her son Henri, born on December 13, 1553, was only eight years old. Since she had no siblings, and both her father and husband were dead, Albret was left to administer her duties as queen as she saw fit. Albret left a chronicle of this critical period. *Les Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret* offer a

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<sup>151</sup> "By mid-February [1562], nobody could any longer look upon Calvinism as the wave of the future in France. It was doomed to remain the creed of a minority party, on the defensive against a formidable multipronged attack from the Counter-Reformation forces at home and abroad" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 173).

glimpse of how an autonomous queen managed her public identity, while successfully defending her lands and her beliefs against two crowns and the papacy.<sup>152</sup> This work shows that Albret abandons small projects like Catherine's conversion and acts as a monarch involved in all matters of state.

### *Les mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret*

Jeanne's *Mémoires* were written after her arrival in the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle in early December 1568.<sup>153</sup> The third War of Religion (1568-1570) had started in August 1568. Up to this point, she had remained neutral and not involved herself in the Wars of Religion, instead choosing to eradicate Catholicism within her own domains.<sup>154</sup> In 1568, all that changed as the Counter-Reformation made decisive victories "in the Netherlands and sought to follow up their advantage in France. The two immediate objectives were the reduction of La

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<sup>152</sup> *Les Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret* is the name given the work by Alphonse de Ruble. In the introduction to this work, he gives the title of the collection that contains the only surviving copy: "*Histoire de nostre temps contenant un Recueil des choses mémorables passées et publiées pour le fait de la religion et estat de la France depuis l'édict de pacification fu 23e jour de mars 1568 jusques au jour présent.*" In this volume of 800 pages, Jeanne's text is buried under the name, "*Ampliation desdictes lettres, contenant les occasions du partement de la dicte dame avec Monsieur le prince de Navarre et Madame Catherine, ses enfans, pour se venir joindre avec Monsieur le prince de Navarre et madame Catherine, ses enfans, pour se venir joindre avec Monsieur le prince de Condé son beau-frère*" (Ruble XII). I have decided to adopt Ruble's name, for it reflects Albret's succinct style much better than its verbose counterpart. For the remainder of the document, this text will be referred to and cited as "*Mémoires.*"

<sup>153</sup> Ruble accepted the *Mémoires* as Albret's own work, as I do. I take Albret at her word one might say, for she writes, ". . . j'ay mis la main à la plume pour amplifier ce dont j'ay desclaré le principal subject en mes susdites lettres, touchant les occasions qui m'ont fait abandonner mes pays souverains. . ." (*Mémoires* 2). According to Ruble, only one critic prior to his study challenged the authorship of Jeanne d'Albret, le père Griffet. Griffet's argument is that royalty rarely wrote for themselves, allowing secretaries to do their work for them. Ruble responds with a different opinion: "Son jugement sur la futilité des princes, 'qui ne s'occupent pas pour l'ordinaire à composer de si longs discours,' peut-être fondé pour les princes et les princesses du XVIIIe siècle, mais non pour ceux du XVIe. Catherine de Médicis, Henri III, Henri IV ont plus écrit qu'un secrétaire de profession ; l'œuvre épistolaire de la plupart des grand du XVIe siècle se chiffre par des milliers de lettres ; Jeanne d'Albret était aussi assidue à sa correspondance que les Valois. . . la plupart des *Mémoires* du XVI siècle ont été rédigés par des princes ou par des grands capitaines" (Ruble VI). "Il n'y a donc rien à reprocher à l'authenticité de l'autobiographie de Jeanne d'Albret. Nous avons sous les yeux un document de premier ordre, un récit original de la plus grande valeur, aussi digne d'intéresser les historiens que de charmer les admirateurs de la reine de Navarre" (Ruble VI-VII).

<sup>154</sup> "Historians have distinguished eight separate Wars of Religion in France. The fighting which began in April 1562 and ended in the Pacification of Amboise, March 19, 1563, counts as the First. The Second and Third Civil Wars also took place in Jeanne's lifetime, and during the latter she reached the height of her career" (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 427).

Rochelle and the capture of the Huguenot leaders. . . . When she learned this, Jeanne decided to abandon neutrality and go to La Rochelle herself, with her children” (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 297).

Albret’s *Mémoires* summarize the years 1560-1568, years in which Albret lost her husband and in which she became more and more outspoken for the Protestant religion. At the beginning of the decade, the political climate favored Protestants, as Catherine de Medici, the queen mother, viewed the Protestant faction as a favorable counterbalance to the powerful Catholic Guise family. The Catholics (both the Guises and the Spanish) had other plans and lured Antoine into their trap. When he failed to convert Albret, he found a way to banish her from the French court.<sup>155</sup> Albret’s transfer of affection to her husband so evident in Albret’s poetic letters to Marguerite fades in her later writing, and his actions divided them both emotionally and politically.

After Albret’s forced departure from the French court in March, her only goal was to return to Béarn—lands inherited from her mother that were still loyal to her—and to “tighten the controls and prepare the military defense of her domains” (Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 197). She finally arrived in August 1562, and Antoine, and his remaining influence over her, died on November 17, 1562. Albret began to pass anti-Catholic legislation, and in 1563, she was excommunicated. She spent the next several years trying to make her realms a Protestant stronghold. Henri had stayed behind at court with his father and essentially, he was a hostage in Catherine de Medici’s hands—another factor that kept Albret out of the Wars of Religion. Using Henri, the French court lured Albret out of her domains, and her departure allowed the Catholic dissenters in Béarn to gain ground. Albret managed to spirit Henri away from the court in

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<sup>155</sup> See Roelker *Queen of Navarre* 180-181.



February 1567 and took refuge in Nérac (in Albret) because Béarn was on the brink of civil war. The second War of Religion began in September 1567, and Albret remained safely in Nérac with Henri until her flight to La Rochelle in September 1568 where she wrote the *Mémoires*.

Her writing in this text had a definite political purpose: to denounce the Cardinal of Lorraine and the Guises, her enemies in matters of state and religion. Alphonse de Ruble describes the *Mémoires* thus:

En écrivant ses *Mémoires*, Jeanne d'Albret n'avait pas l'ambition de raconter l'histoire de son temps ni même l'histoire de sa vie. Réduite à la nécessité de mettre les armes aux mains de son fils et d'abandonner à la fortune de la guerre son royaume et ses sujets, par un devoir qu'elle considère comme plus impérieux que ses devoirs de mère et de reine, elle ravive ses souvenirs et dresse un ardent réquisitoire contre ses ennemis. (Ruble VII)

Even Ruble, who views Albret and her writing so positively, acknowledges her outright partiality: “La pensée toujours élevée malgré ses emportements, le style ferme et net malgré son excessive recherche, se distinguent de la lourde rhétorique du temps. Si l'impartialité de l'historien est trop souvent étouffée par la passion calviniste, le récit gagne en mouvement ce qu'il perd en autorité” (Ruble X). Attached to Albret's *Mémoires* are five letters which yield even more insight into how Albret posed herself in relation to those in power. In these letters, Albret modified her use of maternal self-portrayals and references in accord with the addressee. One would expect the forceful rhetoric used with Madame de Langey, her social inferior, to disappear, but Albret was demanding, especially if she felt that justice was not being served.

Coupled with the letters, Albret's *Mémoires* are indispensable to discovering her move from submissive wife/queen/mother with Protestant leanings to the highest ranking Protestant in France, male or female. In this process, I see Albret's abandonment of socially constrictive feminine roles in favor of her own ideology, yet she continues to exploit traditional roles in order to prevail in two roles: as queen and as Protestant.

First, as a widowed queen, holding on to her kingdom became integral to her identity, and she was respected by her subjects for her unwillingness to allow the French or Spanish crowns or the papacy to sway her or to remove her privileges as queen. Second, she persevered in a religious direction that allowed a woman a more pronounced place in public life than Catholicism. In this study, I focus on Albret's vehement adherence to the Protestant religion as a means to keep her kingdom and assure her son's future, instead of religious fervor on her part. We cannot ever know the sincerity of Albret's relationship to God, but we do know that she uses it as a vehicle to bolster her authority as queen. After all, a Protestant set of guidelines allowed women in Albret's position a vehicle through which she could exert authority over her subjects as a spiritual leader. Albret Additionally, her religion distinguished her from the Catholic monarchs of neighboring France and Spain. Albret had no interest in adopting the religion of her enemies, when she could use Protestantism to encourage solidarity within her own realms.<sup>156</sup> She exploited the place afforded by her adopted religion in order to assert her own authority as queen. As I will show, the *Mémoires*' pages reveal how Albret adroitly used her status as Protestant Queen "mother," while grappling with the family "politics" of her past.

Albret's mother and father do not appear in the *Mémoires*, nor in the letters that accompany them. It would seem that Albret had already dispensed with their influence in her 1555 letter to the Vicomte de Gourdon.<sup>157</sup> However, as I will show, echoes of her own identity struggles with her mother, and even her controlling father, do appear. Unlike her parents, Albret mentions her husband Antoine in the *Mémoires*' first pages. After she recounts his betrayal and

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<sup>156</sup> Other reasons that Protestantism served her political ends: She received support from outside France, namely England. She had powerful male allies like Calvin, Béza, and Coligny, but no longer had to stand behind powerful men. She had solidarity with her subjects in her realms that were a separate entity from France. Ultimately, Protestantism provided her with an ideological boundary designed to maintain the physical boundaries of her kingdom.

<sup>157</sup> See page 118.

death and portrays him as susceptible to the attractive offers of her Catholic enemies, she dismisses him just as she did her parents. Albret then focuses exclusively on herself and Henri. Her past feminine roles of dutiful daughter and obedient wife fall to the side; Albret undermines the significance of her husband, and consequently, her status as his wife/widow. Instead, she cultivates her image as mother.<sup>158</sup>

Albret embraced her position as mother to Henri and to her people in order to show, in varying degrees, her power and to elicit sympathy from those who would be her allies. This seems to be a strange mix, showing power and eliciting sympathy using the same channels, but Albret manages to do both. She remains a mother, but a mother who is more interested in outcomes and who moves her son and her subjects rather like pieces on a chessboard than precious subjects equal to her and to be considered in themselves. Albret is a mother willing to sacrifice all to maintain her kingdom and her beliefs, the sources of her power.

### **Of Mothers and Monarchy**

Albret exploits mother imagery in three distinct ways in the *Mémoires* and the letters attached to them. One, she is the mother of the future King of her lands, Henri. Two, she is mother of her kingdom and subjects. The imagery related to these two often overlap, with Henri frequently appearing as a symbol of Albret's kingdom. The third aspect appears in Albret's letters referenced in the *Mémoires*. Since Albret is writing about the same subject in all five of the letters attached to the *Mémoires*, it is easy to see how she uses mother imagery with different correspondents. By examining these three instances of Albret's maternal imagery, her agenda

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<sup>158</sup> The most striking feature of the *Mémoires*, and the letters that accompany them, is the very different attitude as queen than the one portrayed by Antoine in his responses to her letters and in her exchange with Madame de Langey. The difference I see with Antoine is that she has taken the reins, and no longer is emotionally dependent on him. Additionally, Albret is no longer concerned with making small changes like the conversion of Catherine. Her status as queen now encompasses all aspects of rule, and there is no limit to the domains in which she can act.

becomes clear, and Albret uses the mother role to her advantage rather than allowing any role to be assigned to her. She perseveres through hardship in order to maintain her autonomy.<sup>159</sup>

Albret knew risk. She had suffered as a wife and mother. Her own husband betrayed her. Two of her sons died as infants, and Henri was the only remaining male heir. Albret had a daughter, Catherine, but Catherine was decidedly less important politically than Henri. Albret's kingdom wanted a male heir to ensure that their nation would have staying power against any future threats of the French or Spanish crowns. Albret, of course, recognized this. Instead of a mother-daughter mirroring scenario, Albret focuses on her son's political value. Hence, her preoccupation with Henri fills the *Mémoires* and the letters that accompanied them. She constantly evokes her son, from his fledgling infancy to the independence with which he acts as a young adult. Her repeated use of Henri acknowledges his political importance to her status as queen and to her kingdom. Catherine de Medici, queen mother in her own right as Henri II's widow, also recognized Henri d'Albret's importance to the future of Albret's kingdom and her kingdom's relationship with France. So Catherine, with Antoine's help, kept Henri at court for a long time. Only through ruses and precise planning did Albret manage to take Henri back, and even then there were attempts to return him to the French court: "Il n'y a guères de personnes de qualité qui ne congnoissent le Roy pour prince si doux et si humain qu'un si cruel effect ne peut venir de luy, de faire enlever un fils unique d'entre les bras de sa mère par violence, ou son seul commandement a plus de pouvoir, si je l'ose dire, que ses forces" (*Mémoires* 70-71). This maternal image in the *Mémoires* is especially powerful, because it was common knowledge that Henri had been all but a prisoner at a predominantly Catholic court. Catherine de Medici, nor the king, sanctioned his flight from court with his mother in early 1567. Albret seems to be

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<sup>159</sup> Also, this is where we find Albret at her most confident of all her writings, and where I believe she finds her own voice. (There is no mother mirror here, no weather metaphors to echo, nor any daughter mirror either.)

indicting the king, telling him that if he was involved in the scheme to kidnap her son that he should be ashamed. At the same time, she elicits pity with dramatic rhetoric such as “faire enlever un fils unique d’entre les bras de sa mère par violence”—such bold words for the monarch of a small kingdom constantly in jeopardy and at the time involved in political negotiations with the crown.

In defiance, she sent her fourteen-year-old son to his uncle, the Prince de Condé, one of the Protestant leaders. She writes,

Je livray là mon fils entre les mains de Monsieur son oncle, afin que, sous sa conduite et à l’escole de sa prudence et vaillance, il apprist le mestier auquel Dieu l’a appelé; pour après, quand l’aage et les moyens luy seront donnez, les employer avec sa vie au service de Dieu, de son Roy, et de son sang. C’est donc pour ces trois occasions que je l’ay rendu entre les mains de Monsieur son oncle et envoyé en l’armée chrestienne.  
(*Mémoires* 119)

This was a symbolic gesture, but a necessary one, if Albret was to receive continued support for her cause. For what was the point of defending Protestantism if the leader to be of a Protestant kingdom was himself inclined toward Catholicism? C. Dartigue comments in *La Vicomté de Béarn sous Henri d’Albret* that “. . . for the Reform movement to be seriously launched, it was necessary for the sovereign to set an example and to create the cadres. This was to be the role of Jeanne d’Albret” (qtd. in Roelker, *Queen of Navarre* 123). Henri would ensure that the royal example continued.

Albret must have known that the populace would see things this way. Albret establishes early on that Henri is truly Protestant, despite his captivity at a Catholic court, “...mon fils a esté préservé parmi tant d’assauts en la pureté de sa Réligion” (*Mémoires* 4). She had to show that Henri was as staunchly Protestant as she and that he had every intention of taking the crown at the end of her reign. Preserving her religion in this way also meant preserving one of the pillars

of her autonomy, for Albret relied on the Protestant religion as a means to speak as an autonomous queen and as a way to have solidarity with her loyal subjects.

Albret takes a moment in her text to reflect on her emotions after presenting the scene of Henri joining his uncle. She writes,

Ceux qui ne me congnoissans que mère et par conséquent femme, ne mon fils que pour enfant, nourri délicatement et doucement avec moy, jugeront qu'à ce départ de luy et moy il y ayt eu, selon la proximité, le sexe et l'aage, beaucoup de larmes. Mais, afin de faire paroistre à un chascun de quelle affection je l'ay consacré à une si excellente œuvre, et de quelle alaigresse il y est allé, je diray que la joye, qui d'un costé et d'autre rioit en nos yeux, estoit ouverte en nos visages, de telle façon que le contentement de s'abandonner l'un l'autre pour telle occasion surmontoit toutes les difficultez que le sexe et l'aage et le sang y eussent apporté ; le recommandant à ce grand Dieu. . . (*Mémoires* 119-120)

Once again, the good of the kingdom and her religion prevail over maternal sentiment. She chooses to part with her son, as she fulfills her duty to her faith and kingdom. This parting with her son recalls Albret's parting with her mother.<sup>160</sup> This time, Albret's sorrow is alleviated by her pride at placing her son, kept in the Catholic court of Catherine de Medici for so long, in the keeping of the Protestant army's leader. This parting also rewrites the duty script found in Albret's earlier writings. In this case, she joyously fulfills a duty to a cause she has chosen for herself. Through Henri, Albret affirms her choice and negates past familial politics that placed her at a disadvantage. In her marriage protest, duty justified actions contrary to her will, and in her letters to her mother, duty diminished maternal influence and allowed Jeanne's emergence as an independent emotional subject. Allying her son with Condé was a great personal victory for Albret that culminated in Henri's symbolic leadership of the Protestant armies after the Prince de

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<sup>160</sup> Additionally, this scene might be in dialogue with her despair at the loss of her first-born son. From Antoine's letter, we intuit that her despair caused everyone around her grief (see page 117). This time, she is leaving her son, but she is in control, choosing proudly to place him where he will serve the Protestant cause as well as her own purposes.

Condé's murder in 1659. At the Prince's death, Albret placed Henri at the head of the Protestant armies with his cousin, Henri de Condé (both were fifteen at the time).

Political moves like this one easily reflect Albret's aspirations for her kingdom. She wished her subjects to follow her royal example in a united front against Catholic invaders. Under her guidance, Albret's kingdom moved from neutral domains into outright rebellion against the French crown in order to maintain its autonomy. It was in France's best interest to obtain the lands in Albret's kingdom for several reasons. They might serve as military buffer between France and Spain and/or serve as points of negotiation with enemies. For our purposes, the most significant reason is that Albret's lands harbored the Protestant minority. The third sixteenth-century War of Religion was in part an attempt to bring Albret's lands under the control of the French crown and eradicate the Protestant minority.

In her *Mémoires*, Albret clearly states that she is willing to sacrifice all for her religious beliefs, even if it means abandoning her kingdom, but her claims are usually checked by a counterstatement that reinforces the importance of Albret's realms to her own identity. This queen "mother" is never completely committed to sacrificing her kingdom or the autonomy that goes along with it.

An example of this paradox appears in the *Mémoires*. One moment, she indicates that her religious beliefs come first:

Ceux qui avec plus d'ignorance que de malice se laissoient emporter à leurs frivoles imaginations, m'opposeoyent le travail, où je m'alloy jeter, au repos de mes maisons, lequel, avec la conscience et la religion, je pouvoy à leur avis saintement garder. J'ay supporté volontiers leur ignorance, et leur ay plus doucement respondu qu'aux autres, et mesme que le travail pour le debvoir ne se doibt nommer peine, mais plustost le repos trop cherché en l'ayse de la commodité. Je leur disoy davantage que, quand la personne est appelée par légitime vocation à servir à la gloire de nostre Dieu, tous pays doibvent estre sa propre maison. Pour vous dire vray, j'ay assez fortement repoussé les effrontez, les sages mondains et les ignorans. (*Mémoires* 85-86)

An appropriate statement from a queen who had been chased like a criminal around France until she found refuge in La Rochelle. But in the next phrase, she is careful to qualify her claim. Her concern for her kingdom is a “weakness” that she cannot overcome:

. . . quelques-uns liez à l’amour de leur patrie, les quels me remonstroyent que laisser mes pays, desquels j’estoy tenue rendre compte devant Dieu, n’estoit bien faict, et les abandonner quasi en proye à l’estranger, dont ils estoyent menassez, et mesme davantage en mon absence; que la charité commençoit par les siens, et que ce tort ne touchoit pas seulement à moy et mes enfans, mais à mes subjects, dont le nombre estoit si grand. Ils avançoient leur conséquence jusques à la généralité de la cause, parce qu’ils me voyent là attachée, disant que mes enfans et moy estions personnes publiques, et qu’il ne nous failloit ainsi hazarder ; . . . loin de secours de sa dame souveraine, de l’autre la conscience, que (il faut ici que je confesse mon infirmité), ceux là m’ont faict entrer la pitié au cœur, esmeue par cest amour naturelle que je doy à mes sujets. (*Mémoires* 86-87)

The bulk of Albret’s power derived from her position as queen, so what she claims as “weakness” actually gives her a place of authority from which to speak. This queen mother is not going anywhere, and she will protect her subjects like she would protect her own family. When speaking of wrongs done to her and her children, Albret includes her subjects as well. In addition, Albret identifies herself as “la dame souveraine,” emphasizing her role as royal protector who offers “secours” to her people. The “amour naturelle” for her people easily parallels “amour maternel.” Without her kingdom, Albret would simply be another feeble voice shouting against the Catholic majority. It stands to reason that she would risk the safety of herself and her children and brave the rigors of public opinion to preserve her kingdom and her place as queen—along with the Protestant faith, another pillar of her autonomy.

So how does Albret’s use of the maternal in the *Mémoires* enter into dialogue with her earlier writings? I propose that Albret’s use of Henri as a political tool re-envision her own political marriage to the Prince de Cleves and her tearless departure from her mother. This revised life script supports her autonomous stance. Henri does not oppose his mother’s political moves, and in the text, his actions reinforce Albret’s designs. He is a devout Protestant, even as



a young child, and she uses him to chastise even her most powerful enemies. He is seamlessly joined to his mother's causes. At his mother's request, he leads an army after his uncle's death. The tearful parting scene reverses Albret's experience with her mother. In a literary moment that I view as cathartic, Albret allows proud tears to flow as she fulfills her duty—this time, her duty to herself. In light of Albret's comments on her kingdom, I posit that Albret's religious rhetoric of duty veils a deeper sense of responsibility to the self. Interpreted thus, she does not place her son at the army's head out of *spiritual* obligation to the Protestant faith. Rather, she fulfills an obligation to herself to reinforce the sovereignty of her kingdom—the source of her power to write, speak, and act in the public sphere—through ensuring that the Protestant religion endures and supports her authority over her subjects.

### **The Epistolary Queen Mother**

As a closing section on Albret's use of mother imagery, I would like to discuss the letters that accompanied the *Mémoires*. On the first page of Albret's *Mémoires* she references five letters that she wrote to King Henry II, Catherine de Medici, King Henri II's brother, the Cardinal de Bourbon, and Elizabeth I, the Queen of England. Her purpose in writing the *Mémoires* was “. . . parce que, par quelques lettres que j'ay escrites . . ., je n'ay touché que bien sommairement les choses que je désire plus amplement faire entendre à un chacun, j'ay mis la main à la plume pour amplifier ce dont j'ay desclaré principal subject en mes susdites lettres, . . .” (*Mémoires* 1-2). Ruble states, “Ces cinq lettres ont été imprimées à part et répandues à profusion peu après la prise d'armes du 25 août 1568 pour la justification des réformés” (204). Like the *Mémoires*, these letters were written expressly as political propaganda to support her position.

Albret takes a different approach in each of these letters, two of which are to women like herself, in positions of power. In his introduction to these letters, Ruble quickly summarizes their content:

La lettre au roi est un manifeste, une sorte de déclaration belliqueuse. La lettre à la reine mère rappelle des souvenirs qui devaient tenir au cœur de Catherine, . . . La lettre au duc d'Anjou est un réquisitoire contre le cardinal de Lorraine, que l'on supposait être le conseiller le plus écouté du prince. La lettre au cardinal de Bourbon est une amplification oratoire semée d'apostrophes plus énergiques qu'équitables. La lettre à la reine d'Angleterre, postérieure d'un mois aux quatre autres lettres, est un nouvel acte d'accusation contre le cardinal de Lorraine. Elle a pour but d'apitoyer la reine Elisabeth sur le sort des fidèles sujets du roi forcés de prendre les armes contre lui. (Ruble 204)

Albret's letters to Elizabeth and Catherine, royal women, are written to inspire pity, whereas her letters to men are a catalogue of accusations and justifications of Albret's rebellious actions. The letters to Elizabeth and Catherine are the longest and offer the most interesting material for comparison of mother/child references.<sup>161</sup> For this reason, I have chosen to focus on these two letters in order to determine how Albret exploits the maternal in her appeals. Her adaptation of these references to her addressee is astonishing and clearly shows that Albret was not eclipsed by her role as mother, but rather defined it according to her own political needs and ambitions.

The mother-child references in Catherine's letter deal strictly with *patrie* and *sang royal*. Mothers and infants are separated, and the death of children is implied. God is not mentioned, as Albret serves as a surrogate authority for French Protestants as their *nourrice*:

Ayant veu cela, Madame, par tant de tristes effets, comme les massacres, dont les plaintes ordinaires remplissent vos oreilles ; par voir ceux qui, par l'édit de Pacification espéroient le repos de leurs maisons, vagabonds par la France, sevez de leur naturelle nourrice, les garnisons manger leur substance et, qui pis est, enflés de la patience qu'on a de leurs cruautés barbares, attentent aux Princes du sang, branches de ce trône, lequel ils veulent déraciner, lorsqu'ils l'auront dépouillé de ses dictes branches. ("A la royne Mère," Ruble 211-212)

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<sup>161</sup> The letter to Catherine is longer than the letter to Elizabeth, yet the two have approximately the same number of mother-child references, allowing for a meaningful comparison.

By addressing the Protestant religion this way, Albret asserts her authority as Protestant leader and leaves the Catholic Catherine de Medici to ponder where God fits into this equation.

Albret also mentions the flight of the Prince de Condé and his family from their Catholic pursuers. Catherine, who probably knew the story well, only received a brief reference to this affair, mentioning specifically the Prince and his children: “C’est donc ce sang de France qui leur fait si grand mal au cœur ; comme ils ont continué vers Monsieur le Prince, mon frère, et tous ses petis enfans, au secours duquel le sang appelle mon fils et moy ; et n’y voulons nullment faillir” (“A la Royne Mère,” Ruble 212). The only “mon fils et moy” in this letter is used to justify Albret and Henri’s running to the aid of their blood relative.

Albret makes it clear that even though she is a mother, her religion and her kingdom, pillars of autonomy, take precedence over all personal maternal sentiment. Albret states in her letter to Catherine de Medici: “Je vous supplie très humblement vous remémorer quelle fidélité vous trouvastes en moy, qui, quand il fut question à bon escient de la conservation de ce Royaume, oubliay l’amitié du mary, et hazarday mes enfans” (“A la Royne Mère,” Ruble 210). There is no question here as to which *royaume* Albret references—it is her own—and to keep it, she will risk everything. In closing, Albret presents a powerful image of France as a mother that cannot let her children keep dying: “...et nostre patrie, ceste France, mère et nourrice de tant de gens de bien, ne puisse estre tarie pour laisser mourir ses enfans” (“A la Royne Mère” Ruble 213). Certainly, Catherine noted the somber tone of Albret’s missive.

Albret’s letter to Elizabeth is very different from Catherine’s. The underlying themes in the mother-child references are God (not *patrie*) and once again, *sang royal*.<sup>162</sup> In contrast to the

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<sup>162</sup> This time, Albret substitutes God for France. France is mentioned only once in the context of religious oppression in Elizabeth’s letter. France is never mentioned in conjunction with mother-child references. Understandably so, for England and France were old enemies.

letter to Catherine and its themes of death, images of promise fill the letter to Elizabeth. Albret carefully portrays herself as mother to her Protestant children/subjects in Catherine's letter, but writing to Elizabeth, Albret portrays the English queen specifically as a "Royne nourissière": "Et de tant plus seroit ma faute grande, qu'il a mis par sa grande bonté tant de grâces en vous et un tel zèle à l'avancement de sa gloire, que, pour vous avoir esluë l'une des Roynes nourissières de son Eglise" ("A la Royne d'Angleterre," Ruble 219). In France, Albret is the most important "royne nourissière," but in her letter, Albret acknowledges Elizabeth's place explicitly, while leaving her reader to intuit Albret's role as the second Protestant queen in this exchange.

The Prince de Condé's pregnant wife appears, as she flees with her children. The letter to Elizabeth gives a more detailed account of this story than the letter to Catherine:

. . . voyant arriver monsieur le Prince de Condé, mon frère, qui pour éviter l'entreprinse qu'on avoit faicte contre luy, fut contrainct, plustost que reprendre les armes, venir chercher lieu de seureté ; je di, Madame, avec telle pitié qui accompagnoit la tendre jeunesse de ses petits princes et de leur mère grosse, que je ne sache bon cœur à qui ceste piteuse histoire ne face grand mal. ("A la Royne d'Angleterre," Ruble 220-221)

This passage in the letter to Catherine was designed to justify Albret's actions, and in the letter to Elizabeth elicits pity and support for Albret, the mother of French Protestants, and Henri, their future hope.

Albret and her children are very present in letter to Elizabeth. She tends to use the commonplace, "mon fils et moy" often, where the expression is only used once in the letter to Catherine. Albret begins by presenting herself as a mother with children who has been chased from her home: ". . . il se présente aujourd'huy un subject qui me accuseroit grandement, si par mes lettres, je ne vous faisoie entendre l'occasion qui m'a menée icy, avec les deux enfans qu'il a pleu à Dieu me prester" ("A la Royne d'Angleterre," Ruble 219). She describes with dramatic language the plots to kidnap her son: "De l'austre costé, j'estoi advertie que l'on avoit despesché

pour me venir ravir mon fils d'entre les mains" ("A la Royne d'Angleterre," Ruble 221).<sup>163</sup>

Albret closes the letter by referencing her children and offering service to Elizabeth. ". . . et qu'il vous plaise, Madame, recevoir icy les très humbles recommandations de la mère et des enfans, qui désireroyent infiniment avoir le moyen de vous faire service" ("A la Royne d'Angleterre," Ruble 221).

In this letter, unlike the letter to Catherine, promising images offer future hope. Mother and children are together, and themes of death are absent. Albret presents herself alongside these images as a mother concerned not only with her son, but with the fate of her kingdom and religion.

An examination of the mother-child references in these texts reveals that Albret plays a political game with these powerful women. She creates a maternal image that suits the message she wants each to receive. The morbid mother images in the letter to Catherine, and the promising maternal images in the letter to Elizabeth are no coincidence. The images of Catherine's letter echo the bloody war that has raged in France between the Protestants and Catholics. Albret knows that she will never reach an accord with Catherine, for Albret will never return to the Catholic faith—war will continue. The images of Elizabeth's letter emphasize that an alliance between Albret and the English crown can only bring a new beginning for the Protestant religion by uniting two of the strongest "royne nourissières" together. This hope echoes Albret's purpose in her political writings—to strengthen her autonomy and maintain her freedom to act in the public sphere.

Albret uses maternal references in the *Mémoires* and in her letters to Catherine and Elizabeth to authorize her non-traditional participation in public life. Albret writes politically in

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<sup>163</sup> This same story is found in the *Mémoires* 70-71.

these texts as an autonomous queen. Her past dependencies—on her mother, on Antoine—disappear. Her mother is nowhere to be found, and Antoine is dismissed as a weak, yet loved husband. She does not stand behind Henri and the future he represents; rather, she exploits her role as his mother to support her activities in the present as Protestant queen. Additionally, she does not allow her kingdom and her identity as queen to eclipse her own subjectivity. Her use of maternal imagery in these texts works on both a personal and political level. She acknowledges the duty she has to herself, while emphasizing that she is more than just a mother to a future king. Additionally, Albret, as autonomous queen, solidifies her involvement with the Protestant cause and uses her royal and religious affiliations to authorize her political writing.

Although critics often eclipse Albret's significance and favor her mother and son, her life and her writings tell another story. Albret surpassed her mother and eventually escaped the overbearing male influences around her. Unlike her mother and daughter, Albret lived for over a decade as an independent queen, free from the influence of her ambitious father and husband. Although Albret likely embraced the Protestant religion for political reasons, as her life continued, she chose to stand by her 1560 Christmas conversion and jeopardized her power and her life for the Protestant cause. Within the bounds of her faith, she found the driving force to oppose those who would threaten her sovereignty and to stand up to overwhelming odds. I posit that personal fulfillment accompanied these public victories. Albret escaped the mother-daughter mirror by gazing towards the future. She survived a difficult marital relationship. Even during her marriage, she found small ways to build up her own identity, channeling her energies into religious accomplishments that did not efface her worth or threaten her independence. When she recreated the mother-daughter mirror through Madame de Langey and her daughter, Albret took emotions out of the equation and exploited the power of duty. After Antoine's death,

Albret's life did not revolve solely around her children, and in the writings examined here, Henri's importance and her mother's renown serve as pillars to her own identity—an identity that, with future study and a new resurgence in Jeanne d'Albret studies, will finally receive its due.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Benard d'Aas's new version of the *Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret* will be published in late October 2007.

**Chapter Four:**  
***Pièces Justificatives: Reconstructing Identity in the Works of***  
**Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu**

Plus je relis ce que vous faites,  
Plus je connois ce que vous êtes,  
Il ne faut que vous mettre en train.  
Tout le monde, Iris, vous admire,  
Si les Dieux se mêloient d'écrire,  
Ils emprunteroient votre main,  
Vous faites des choses si belles.  
Si justes et si naturelles,  
Que vostre style est sans égal :  
Sans cesse je vous estudie,  
Qui peut estre votre copie  
passe pour un original. –Saint-Pavin, 1665<sup>165</sup>

Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu was widely celebrated during her time. Saint-Pavin, along with numerous other poets, playwrights, and novelists like Madeleine de Scudéry, praised her work.<sup>166</sup> The publisher of many of her texts, Claude Barbin, described Villedieu thus: “Elle était grande, bien faite, avait bonne mine, mais elle n’était pas belle. . . . Mme de Villedieu ne possédait pas tous les avantages de son sexe, mais en récompense elle possédait tous ceux du nôtre” (qtd. in Cuénin 140). Barbin implies that she lived publicly and wrote boldly in an era when the definitive links between women and their works were preferably kept in the salon milieu. Most women published anonymously, but after a brief apprenticeship in the salons, Villedieu openly signed many of her published works. Her popularity stemmed from her sometimes-controversial writing, and her “notorious” life.

Villedieu was born to bourgeois parents in 1640. Her childhood is a mystery, but in 1655, she made a promise of marriage to her cousin, François de Saint-Val. Villedieu’s father

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<sup>165</sup> The text of this poem by the controversial libertine Denis Sanguin de Saint-Pavin was taken from page 418 of Frédéric LaChèvre’s *Disciples et Successeurs de Théophile de Viau*. Paris: Champion, 1911.

<sup>166</sup> In a letter written to Bussy-Rabutin, April 14, 1672, Scudéry writes, “On a fait un petit roman, qui s’appelle *Les Exilés*, qui est très joli. . . . Voyez ce petit roman ; rien n’est plus joli ; il est de mademoiselle Desjardins” (qtd. in Goldsmith and Winn 327).



filed a lawsuit to prevent the marriage. That same year her mother, Catherine Ferrand, filed and obtained a legal separation from Guillaume Desjardins and moved the family to Paris. Ferrand found employ with Madame de Montbazon, and Villedieu was introduced to salon society. Still a young woman, Villedieu emancipated herself and had a room in Paris, and, as Tallemant des Réaux comments in his *Historiettes*, “elle y soit sous sa bonne foi” (900).

In 1658, Villedieu fell in love with a man that would change her life forever, Antoine de Boësset, sieur de Villedieu. In this same year, her sonnet, “Jouissance,” appeared. She continued to write and live in Paris, and her literary self-portrait was published in Mademoiselle de Montpensier’s collection along with all the other notables of salon culture. The author subsequently published plays, poems, and even an unfinished novel, *Alcidamie*. Villedieu and Antoine’s tumultuous relationship ultimately ended in 1667. This disastrous year played host to Villedieu’s extreme financial difficulties, a *nouvelle* entitled *Anaxandre* written on a trip abroad, the imminent publication of her private love letters (given to the publisher by Villedieu), Antoine’s marriage to a more “suitable” woman, her father’s death, and finally in August, Antoine’s death.

Villedieu continued to write after Antoine’s death and the publication of her private love letters. She also continued to live independently. She wrote so many works during the period of 1668-1672 that she retired to the Benedictine Convent of Conflans in 1672. There she finished *Les mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* in 1674. Her last reflection on her tumultuous relationship with Antoine appears in *Les désordres de l’amour* a year later. Granted a royal pension the following year, Villedieu withdrew from the literary world, but even after her

death in 1683, the world did not forget her.<sup>167</sup> Her works were collected, published, and reissued twice in the eighteenth century.<sup>168</sup> Villedieu definitely left her literary mark on the seventeenth century, and her controversial life only added to the appeal of this wildly popular writer.<sup>169</sup>

Villedieu's popularity and her need to earn a living kept her from an anonymous publishing career. She signed the majority of her works. In 1658, her first successful sonnet, "Jouissance," began to circulate and garner both praise and criticism. Undoubtedly written for her lover, Antoine de Boësset, sieur de Villedieu, "Jouissance" was a controversial entry into the writing world, for she describes a *woman's* physical pleasure.<sup>170</sup> Micheline Cuénin, to whom all recent critics of Villedieu are indebted, comments about this first sonnet,

Non que le genre, en soi, fût condamné, mais il était réservé aux hommes qui y bravaient souvent l'honnêteté. Les bienséances toléraient tout juste des femmes l'expression tendre de la mélancolie ou d'une passion déçue. Autant les Elégies de la comtesse de la Suze lui

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<sup>167</sup> "Villedieu and Scudéry were the only seventeenth-century literary women to receive royal pensions" (DeJean, *Tender Geographies* 254, n. 5).

<sup>168</sup> There is another side to Villedieu's disappearance from the literary world. In 1677, Villedieu married Louis de Chaste, and the year after had a son. Villedieu's husband died in 1679. Two works appeared posthumously: *Le portrait des faiblesses humaines* (1685) and *Les annales galantes de Grèce* (1687). Since my study is primarily concerned with how Villedieu's writing dialogued with her life, I have elected not to include the denouement of her life that is not accompanied by published writing in my consideration of her journey to subjectivity. These events occur after *Les désordres de l'amour*, the work I will identify as the culmination of Villedieu's self-definition.

<sup>169</sup> The details of this biographical sketch are taken from Micheline Cuénin's study, *Roman et Société sous Louis XIV: Madame de Villedieu (Marie Catherine Desjardins 1640-1683)*.

<sup>170</sup> Aujourd'hui dans tes bras j'ai demeuré pâmée ;  
Aujourd'hui, cher Tirsis, ton amoureuse ardeur  
Triomphe impunément de toute ma pudeur  
Et je cède aux transports dont mon âme est charmée.

Ta flamme et ton respect m'ont enfin désarmée ;  
Dans nos embrassements, je mets tout mon bonheur,  
Et je ne connais plus de vertus ni d'honneur  
Puisque j'aime Tirsis et que j'en suis aimée.

Ô vous, faibles esprits qui ne connaissez pas  
Les plaisirs les plus doux que l'on goût ici-bas,  
Apprenez les transports dont mon âme est ravie.

Une douce langueur m'ôte le sentiment ;  
Je meurs entre les bras de mon fidèle amant,  
Et c'est dans cette mort que je trouve la vie (qtd. in Demoris 9).

avaient valu l'estime générale, autant Mlle Desjardins suscita la réprobation. (Cuénin 104-105)

One of Villedieu's contemporaries, Tallemant des Réaux, was the seventeenth-century equivalent to the modern-day gossip columnist. Although his comments on the author were not published until the nineteenth century, his "column" circulated in society during her life. Réaux gives the details of Villedieu and Antoine's relationship:

. . . à un bal où elle estoit, il y avoit un garçon appelé la Villedieu [Antoine] ; il porte l'espée. Ce garçon sortit du bal, et puis revint en disant qu'on n'avoit jamais voulu luy ouvrir la porte chez luy, et qu'il ne sçavoit où aller coucher. Nostre rimeuse luy offrit son lit, et tout en riant, il va avec elle et demure à coucher. . . . Ce garçon tombe malade ce nuict-là, et si malade qu'il fut six semaines avant que de pouvoir estre transporter. Elle eut tant de soing de luy durant son grand mal, que, ne croyant pas en r'eschapper, il pensa estre obligé à luy dire qu'il l'espouserait, s'il en revenoit. Il en revint, il coucha avec elle trois mois durant assez publiquement" (Réaux 902).

Coupled with "Jouissance," Réaux's comments fix Villedieu's reputation as a notorious woman. Despite Réaux's disapproval, the sonnet would not be her last literary step. Beyond sonnets, she composed plays, *nouvelles*, and *romans galants*.<sup>171</sup> Bowing to tradition, she wrote her fair share of elegies like Madame de la Suze, yet Villedieu subverted expectation by substituting passionate reveries like the ones found in "Jouissance" for Madame de Suze's traditional, sorrowful themes.<sup>172</sup>

In a century where reality and fiction often intersected in the form of a *roman à clef*, writing changed the course of many women's lives. This was doubly so for the woman who dared to write outside of prescribed genres and decorum. Villedieu, whose reputation was

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<sup>171</sup> Essentially, in Villedieu's era, the difference between these two genres was their length. The *roman* was long, and the *nouvelle* was short. Klein addresses the confusion between the *nouvelle* and *roman* as genres: "The confusion in terminology hides deeply rooted narrative changes that were taking place in the two genres, *roman* and *nouvelle*. In 1660, the stories told by characters within the framework of the novels break away to become episodes which emerge as free-standing nouvelles in their own right. Madame de Villedieu is credited with establishing *la nouvelle galante*" (*Female Protagonist* 2).

<sup>172</sup> "La comtesse de la Suze (1618-1673) : auteur de poésies mondaines, de tonalité légère ou grave (*Recueils de pièces galantes*, 1666) (Demoris 270, n. 10). Elegies in the *précieux* style called for "the sincere expression of deep emotion" (Jensen, *Writing Love* 52).

captured in writings by Réaux among others, endured public scrutiny. The public perception of a seventeenth-century woman writer's works eclipsed the real "woman," for her writing became the perceived reality of her life. The author's decision to counter tradition contributed to her popularity, but complicated her private life. Due to financial hardship, Villedieu continued to expose herself to the public eye, even after some of her most private thoughts made their way to print in the form of her love letters written to Antoine. At times, her writings appear to be reflections on her own experiences. Not surprisingly, women writers and their writings permeate her works. Their identities are, for the most part, veiled under layers of fiction. A character's heartfelt letter or inspired poem may fuel the narrative, or it may simply appear as a digression. As I will show, the women writers that Villedieu portrays in her fiction invite comparison between author and characters.

Seduced by the similarities, critics in the eighteenth century read Villedieu's works as reality. Because she was seen as a scandalous woman, her works were deemed unsuitable for the literary canon:

When women writers are evoked by any of the eighteenth century's literary pedagogues, it is almost always simply to explain in summary why their works should no longer be read. [One pedagogue-critic wrote, "Villedieu's] works are little read today, and I dare say that they are still read too much, considering the danger that young men, above all, cannot fail to encounter from their reading." (DeJean, *Tender Geographies* 193).

In the seventeenth, as well as the eighteenth centuries, the public put women on trial. They were either virtuous or notorious. I will show how Villedieu, as a notorious woman, grappled with the repercussions of her reputation and writing through fictionalized self-portrayals.

Autobiographical textual references evidence the dialogue between an author's life and writing. However, reading too much of an author's life into her fictional characters sometimes misleads the reader. Despite the presence of convincing autobiographical references, I will avoid

reducing Villedieu to her fictional characters (or vice-versa) like her eighteenth-century critics. Instead, I will focus on how Villedieu creates various images of the woman writer in texts with autobiographical echoes. I will then explore how that image enters into dialogue with, over time, the key events in Villedieu's life. This comparison yields the author's perception of her own status as writer during different stages of her career. The disastrous events of 1667—the publishing of her private love letters and Antoine's death—profoundly affected her writing. I will compare two works that Cuénin identifies as more “autobiographical” than others:

*Anaxandre* and *Les mémoires de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*. These works stand on opposite sides of this difficult time in her life.<sup>173</sup>

Written in early 1667, the idealistic *Anaxandre* is a thinly veiled, idealized retelling of Villedieu's love affair with Antoine dedicated to the rather prudish ladies of Brussels. In contrast, the picaresque *Mémoires*, started in 1672 and finished in 1674, are the writings of a woman who seeks to counter the public misinterpretation of her extraordinary life. Since these

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<sup>173</sup> Critics disagree concerning the autobiographical works of Villedieu. Cuénin states, “Il suffira d’une incitation des événements pour lui faire franchir le pas décisif ; sous les noms d’Iris dans *Anaxandre* et d’Henriette-Sylvie quelques années plus tard, Marie-Catherine Desjardins fera confidence au public de ses convictions et de ses expériences profondes.” (Cuénin 248-249). Whereas Joan DeJean states, “I am indebted to Cuénin’s research, but I take exception to . . . the assumptions that direct her presentation of Villedieu. . . . Cuénin reads Villedieu’s works, in particular the *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*, as autobiographical. While her heroine is certainly a free spirit, as the novelist appears to have been, many of Sylvie’s adventures are flagrantly fictional; it is difficult to know where to stop once one begins to read pseudomemoirs as factual accounts” (DeJean, *Tender Geographies* 253).

These two perspectives reveal the enigmatic nature of the term “autobiographical,” as DeJean sees it as relating to a “factual account,” whereas Cuénin reads it as more of a nuanced presence of the author's major life experiences. Indeed, DeJean is correct. It is difficult to know where to draw the line between reality and fiction, yet in a century where a game was made in the form of the *roman à clef* of figuring out where reality and fiction intersected, it stands to reason that an author would willingly leave traces of her/his own experience in her/his writing.

In her work, Cuénin only presents *Anaxandre* and the *Mémoires* under the heading of “L’autobiographie,” and she acknowledges the limitations of reading authors’ lives into their fictional characters: “Les relations entre l’auteur et son personnage sont en effet subtiles et ambiguës. [Here Cuénin inserts the note, “Sur le narrateur-personnage à propos des *MHSM*, voir la pénétrante analyse de M. Th. Hipp, *Romans et Mémoires*, p. 703 sq.” (256, n. 83).] D’une part la créatrice fait oeuvre littéraire en composant des *Mémoires* qui, vu son rang, et sans doute son sexe, ne peuvent être que ‘faux’” (256).

Many critics agree that the two fictional texts where these traces seem to have the most pronounced presence are *Anaxandre* and the *Mémoires*; thus, these two works are the most complete approximation of Villedieu's portrayal of herself (or at least, women writers in general) in Villedieu's *œuvre*.

texts span her writing career (1658 to 1675), they offer a reflection on Villedieu's changing perspective of her own status as writer. Each work features at least one woman writer and both constitute a defense against public criticism.

A third autobiographical text, her *portrait galant* (1659), will serve as the guide for this comparison. Themes that appear in the literary portrait will provide specific points of comparison between *Anaxandre* and the *Mémoires*. By comparing the two, I will explore the changing function of the woman writer and her writings in Villedieu's texts. By following the evolution from the idealism of *Anaxandre* to the pessimism offered by her *Mémoires*, I will show that the author ultimately rediscovers the importance of the woman behind the text. Additionally, I will show that as the value of a woman's writing fades in the *Mémoires*, the importance of the writing woman enables Villedieu to reconcile the woman writer and her works in the final work of her career, *Les désordres de l'amour*.<sup>174</sup>

### ***Portrait galant***

Written in 1659, Villedieu's *portrait galant* is one of her first known works that is not poetry. The work conveys the same self-assurance and bold attitude found in her first popular poem, "Jouissance." Of her three texts identified as autobiographical, this literary portrait is Villedieu's most open description of herself and eschews the cover of pseudonyms or narrative pretense ever-present in her later works.<sup>175</sup> The overall tone of the text is optimistic, as a

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<sup>174</sup> I hesitate to accept fictional characters as a factual rendition of Villedieu's experience. However, reading the situation the author presents (and the way she situates her characters in circumstances similar to her own) at least gives us the author's perspective, if not on her own life events, then at least an interpretation thereof. This interpretation read along-side the reality we know offers a glimpse into how Villedieu moved from salon prodigy to respected novelist, but also offers some unexpected finds.

<sup>175</sup> Of course, limitations and restrictions of the genre should be taken into consideration, although in Mademoiselle de Montpensier's collection, the literary portrait had evolved: "Indeed the portrait mode initiated by Mademoiselle . . . recorded a more accurate image of reality. Of course, portraits had flourished earlier in the Scudéry novels. But these belonged to the *roman* tradition. Masking the effects of time and place, they idealized their subjects.

confident, young writer addresses the salon culture that praises her. Surprisingly, her work is one of the few *self*-portraits in the *Galerie des portraits*—a bold move for a , young, bourgeois woman engaging the aristocratic milieu. Although her portrait certainly respects the dictates of form, Micheline Cuénin asserts that the work bears Villedieu’s mark:

C’est en effet les dispositions du caractère et l’être social qui sont ici objet d’analyse, en un style qui rappelle le laisser-aller de la conversation. Dans ces figures imposées, Mlle Desjardins ne semble nullement mal à l’aise ; elle ne cache pas qu’elle suit la mode et lui obéit volontiers, non sans laisser toutefois d’imprimer à l’exercice une marque individuelle. (Cuénin 108)

I will define this *marque individuelle* (that which reflects her individual experience versus the collective demands of the genre) and use it as a starting point for this analysis.

The *portrait* begins as Villedieu excuses her physical appearance, while assuring the reader that her mind is her strength:

De tout cela il résulte que je ne suis pas une forte belle fille, mais qu’aussi je ne fais pas peur ; et j’ose dire que j’aurois bien plus d’avantage de montrer mon âme que mon corps et mon esprit que mon visage ; car, sans vanité, je n’ai pas eu d’inclination déréglée. (*Portrait* 224)

Later she expounds on this idea. When she arrives at discussing her “esprit,” she does so in these terms:<sup>176</sup>

Pour mon esprit, je puis dire qu’il est assez agréable et même assez universel. Je sais assez le monde et me tire assez bien d’une conversation. J’ai de l’inclination pour la poésie, et quand il m’est arrivé de faire des vers j’y ai passablement réussi, mais je ne m’en veux pas prévaloir, car ce qui s’acquiert sans peine ne mérite pas beaucoup de louanges. (*Portrait* 226)

Villedieu differentiates herself as a woman with *esprit*. Her writing comes easily and, despite her modest pretense, distinguishes herself as a talented author. In the portrait genre, one might

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Moreover, by isolating the portrait, by removing it from this narrative context, Mademoiselle reexamined the mimetic possibilities of this literary form” (Dijkstra 21).

<sup>176</sup> “The word *esprit* carries multiple meanings in French, connotating mind, intellect, thought, wit, spirit. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was systematically opposed to *âme* (soul) or *coeur* (heart). This opposition . . . generally worked to women’s disadvantage” (Jensen, *Writing Love* 168, n.7).

expect the author to laud her/his own writing, yet, for women, this departed from the dictates of form. According to Jacqueline Plantié, “Le seul élément original, c’est la vigueur du style, et l’aveu qu’elle réussit en vers, aveu assez rare pour une femme” (qtd. in Cuénin 108, n. 26). This valorization of her intellectual talents is the first feature of the *marque individuelle* of her portrait. Even though she lauds her writing talents, she acknowledges another distinction that leaves her more vulnerable than those around her, that of class.

The literary portrait was a genre usually reserved for the wealthy nobility, and the portraitist generally praised her/his subject by commenting on their penchant to help the poor. Plantié asserts that Villedieu follows this convention as well, despite her inferior financial status: “C’est un portrait typique de la mode . . . qui recueille quelques lieux communs presque obligés (du genre: ‘J’aime mieux donner que recevoir’)” (qtd. in Cuénin 108, n. 26). The author emphasizes that she should have been of a higher class.<sup>177</sup>

J’ai une compassion si grande pour les malheureux, que bien souvent la pitié qu’ils me causent me met de leur nombre. J’ai une si vaste pente à la libéralité que j’ai cent fois murmuré de n’être point dans un rang assez élevé pour porter jusqu’au delà de ses bornes une vertu que j’admire et que la disposition des choses ne me permet pas de pratiquer. (*Portrait* 225)

Although the generosity trope was a common one, Villedieu’s special social situation, in conjunction with her need for financial solvency, transform her simple charitable wish into a social critique that would echo the complaints of her later heroine, Sylvie.<sup>178</sup>

Furthermore, Villedieu implies that pity has caused her to give beyond her means making her a *member* of the *malheureux*. The author metamorphoses the generosity trope by writing it

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<sup>177</sup> Joan DeJean also observes, “The young woman stresses her compassion for the poor and the fact that she has frequently ‘complained that her social rank is not elevated enough’ to allow her to do something about their misery” (254, n. 4).

<sup>178</sup> Villedieu’s character Sylvie also wrote in a genre reserved for the nobility, memoirs.



from a financially insecure woman's perspective. In a genre reserved for the nobility, this must have been a striking element for the seventeenth-century aristocratic reader.

At the same time, however, Villedieu's connection to aristocratic circles made her writing possible. Introduced to this milieu at a young age, she wrote for a social class that was not her own. Her livelihood depended on pleasing those around her. These circumstances reveal the last feature of her self-portrait's *marque individuelle*, the question of *discrétion*.

Villedieu needed protectors from the noble set, for she found that writing put a woman in an ambiguous position. The blurred margins of life and fiction led her down a difficult path, a path that would have been much easier to tread had she been financially secure. Public opinion could easily influence a patron's generosity, and *discrétion*, as Villedieu defines it, was imperative to her own pursuits, both as a public figure with a private life and as a writer who wrote in an era when the lines between literature and fiction were blurred. She would not wish to displease patrons by presenting something in her literature that might damage their reputations or their conception of her.

Her concern with *discrétion* in her portrait seems prophetic, for her reputation as a professional woman writer proved a popular topic for gossip:

Ce n'est pas que je donne grande matière de discrétion, car j'ai de la vertu et de cette vertu qui est également éloignée du scrupule et de l'emportement, dont la simplicité fait la force, et la nudité le plus grand ornement; mais enfin quand je ne dirois à un ami que ce qui seroit affiché, si je le lui disois à l'oreille, je prétendrois que rien ne le pourroit dispenser de garder le secret, et pour ne pratiquer pas ce que je condamne, je suis la plus discrète fille de la terre. (*Portrait* 225-226)

Villedieu is careful to define what she means by *discrétion*, and essentially, if something is said in confidence, then it should not be repeated. The private should stay private, yet exchanges destined for the public sphere are material for witty conversation: "J'aime fort à railler et ne me fâche jamais qu'on me raille, pourvu que je sois présente, car je ne puis souffrir qu'on poignarde

les gens endormis. . .” (*Portrait* 226). The author appreciates biting banter, but as a young woman, she realized that in her adopted world, everyone, even a literary favorite of the salon like herself, was a target. Plantié comments, “L’insistance de la discrétion . . . et la sensibilité paraissent des éléments plus personnels” (qtd. in Cuénin 109, n. 26). Like Plantié, I see the author’s emphasis on privacy as a cautionary remark from a woman who certainly knew that her personal good fortune might be lost as easily as it was gained. Villedieu did not have financial resources to rely on if she fell out of favor like her aristocratic counterparts. Her writing was the key to her survival, and her portrait indicates that she knew the importance of keeping her reputation agreeable to those she pleased, and the hardship, financial and otherwise, that malicious slander and an exposed private life could cause.

The concerns of the writing woman, class, and *discrétion* did not manifest in her autobiographical literature fully until the *Mémoires*, but their literary seeds were sewn in her *portait galant*. Not surprisingly, in her autobiographical works, Villedieu seemed to acknowledge herself as a target whose public and private life fueled the social commentary of writers like Tallemant des Réaux. It is no wonder that both works, *Anaxandre* and the *Mémoires* are written explicitly as defenses against public opinion. Villedieu defends herself in *Anaxandre*, and in the *Mémoires*, the character, Sylvie, writes to clarify and justify her actions. By analyzing the difference in these two defenses in tandem with the salient features of the author’s self-portrait, this analysis will identify how time and circumstance changed the way Villedieu portrayed the woman writer and moved from the naive, ambitious author in her portrait to the experienced voice of the *Mémoires*. Ultimately, with her *Mémoires*, she returned to a statement made years before in her self-portrait, “Voilà comme je suis faite ou du moins comme je suis” (*Portrait* 227). The “je suis faite” refers to Villedieu’s less than desirable physical appearance

and in the context of the *Mémoires*, how society assigned an identity to Villedieu. The “je suis faite” is juxtaposed with the “je suis” which refers to who Villedieu actually is. The “je suis” privileges the true self over any artificial constructions of identity assigned to Villedieu after her participation in the public sphere.

After the publication of her self-portrait in 1659, Villedieu gained more experience as a writer, and her popularity grew despite her involvement in one of the seventeenth century’s most controversial literary disputes. Drama was considered the “King’s genre,” and under the tutelage of the abbé d’Aubignac, Villedieu published *Manlius Torquatus* (1662). The play met with some success, but received criticism from Corneille and his camp because the expected ending is altered.<sup>179</sup> This began a quarrel between the abbé d’Aubignac and Corneille’s supporters that threatened to bring Villedieu’s reputation down with it. Her solution was to write another play, *Nitétis* (1663), on her own. Cuénin comments, “Pour sortir de cette galère et se dégager d’une querelle où elle avait tout à perdre, Mlle Desjardins voulut aussitôt disjoindre son nom de celui d’un maître qui s’acharnait à la compromettre, et décida de faire ses preuves en composant sur-le-champ une autre tragédie” (Cuénin 119). *Nitétis* met with little favor, but she later redeemed herself with *Le favory* (1664), a play that received praise from Louis XIV. She successfully extricated herself from a potentially harmful situation.

Despite her association with the *Manlius* scandal, her published writings did not cause enough controversy to decrease the popularity of her works. It should be remembered that her

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<sup>179</sup> “*Manlius*, like Corneille’s *Sertorius*, which had enjoyed great success earlier in the same year (1662), was a play based on Roman history. The consul Torquatus orders his son Manlius killed, presumably because he has disobeyed orders and defeated the Latins, but in reality because the father loves his son’s betrothed Omphale. When a revolt of the soldiers frees Manlius, he returns to his father and offers to submit to his sentence; the consul, conscience-stricken, pardons him and allows his marriage with Omphale to take place, consoling himself with Camille, the widow of Decius” (Morrisette 64-65). The controversy concerned the ending; Morrisette notes, “. . . Mlle Desjardins had changed the well-known historical event related by Livy, and caused Torquatus to forgive his son instead of killing him” (65).

sonnet, “Jouissance,” (her sexually explicit foray into literary territory reserved for men), brought her more admirers and solidified her place in aristocratic society. Even the debate over *Manlius* between the abbé d’Aubignac and Corneille (or the Cornélians) enhanced her reputation and eventually led to Molière’s successful *mise en scène* of Villedieu’s third and last play, *Le favory*, for Louis XIV. This was her last attempt at drama, as she turned to the *nouvelle* and eventually the *roman galant*, genres in which she had more success. Rather than associating herself and her writing with any particular salon or male author, Villedieu struck out on her own. After this stage of her career, she used her name on most of her works and assiduously cultivated her own reputation as a writer. During this period, Villedieu’s literary works circulated with success and did not greatly trouble her reputation or private life.

*Anaxandre*, though written as a defense of Villedieu’s reputation, reflects the successful, confident author that typified her career before 1667. *Anaxandre* was not her first *nouvelle*, but it is the one in which the most autobiographical information intertwines with the narrative.<sup>180</sup> In addition, women’s writing has a privileged place in the pages of this work. Villedieu wrote *Anaxandre* just before the most disastrous events of her life. The text’s ideal view of the woman writer is untouched by questions of class and slander, prominent features of Villedieu’s literary portrait and later autobiographical work, the *Mémoires*.

### *Anaxandre*

On February 5, 1667, Antoine obtained a legal separation from Villedieu.<sup>181</sup> This was likely one motivating factor for the author’s trip abroad in March. Additionally, Villedieu also

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<sup>180</sup> Autobiographical indications are catalogued by Cuénin on pages 249-251, especially page 250, note 67. In addition, the scene of the young Iris and Clidamis meeting at a ball, and Iris subsequently becoming inspired to write poetry possibly reflect Villedieu’s experience with Antoine. For more details, see pages 902-903 of the *Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux*, vol. II. Dijon: Gallimard, 1961.

<sup>181</sup> See Cuénin 45, n. 93.

had a *procès* in Holland on which her finances depended. According to Cuénin, she began her voyage in Brussels and did not leave for Holland until May 10, 1667.<sup>182</sup> Belgium left a lasting impression, as the *nouvelle*, *Anaxandre*, is dedicated to the *Dames de Bruxelles*. The author was well-received by the *émigrés* she met along the way, yet the prudish women at the court of Brussels did not appreciate Villedieu or her reputation. Cuénin comments, “Tandis que les messieurs s’avouent conquis par l’enjouement de la jeune Parisienne tout autant que par les hautes recommandations dont elle est l’objet, les dames se scandalisent de voir cette impudique aventurière reçue et fêtée jusque chez le gouverneur” (248). The exact date of *Anaxandre*’s composition is not known, but the text dates from between her arrival in March and its first publication on June 20, 1667.<sup>183</sup>

*Anaxandre* begins with a dedicatory letter addressed to the *Dames de Bruxelles* (Ladies of Brussels).<sup>184</sup> In this letter, Villedieu reveals her plan to correct certain public misconceptions about her life. The author then yields the role of narrator to the title character, Anaxandre, in the pre-text. Anaxandre introduces himself and presents an elegy composed by a woman named Iris. Anaxandre, the quintessential *homme galant*, successfully trades in love poetry until he arrives at the prudish *Isle des Vertus* inhabited by the *Belles Insulaires*. Using Iris’s elegy, he finally gains the favor of these prudish ladies. After the elegy piques their interest, Anaxandre recounts the love story of Iris and Clidamis. Obviously, Villedieu had an eye on her French reading public as well when she wrote this *nouvelle*, for she includes a thinly disguised version of herself and Antoine under the pseudonyms, Iris and Clidamis. Nancy Klein explains:

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<sup>182</sup> See Cuénin 46, n. 100.

<sup>183</sup> Klein asserts, “the first edition of the story [was] published in Paris by Jean Ribou dated June 20, 1667” (*Female Protagonist* 91).

<sup>184</sup> Using Klein’s terminology, parts of the *nouvelle*, *Anaxandre*, include: “dedicatory letter,” “pre-text” (if present), “narrative,” and “after-note” (*Female Protagonist* 91).

To the French reading public of the 1660's, the names Iris and Clidamis are quite familiar. In the gallant poetry of the times, Iris designates Marie-Catherine Desjardins, while Clidamis refers to [Antoine de Boësset] Sieur de Villedieu. One finds [the] name Clidamis used as early as 1662, in a poem published in Mme de Villedieu's *Recueil*, entitled *A Clidamis, Eglogue*." (*Female Protagonist* 97)

After the pre-text, Anaxandre begins his narrative about the lovers bearing the pseudonyms of Antoine and Desjardins de Villedieu, Clidamis and Iris, respectively. The lovers publicly declare their passion at a ball. Evenly matched, the only obstacle to their marriage is Clidamis's military duties. Iris vows to wait and writes passionate verses. Anaxandre, a foreigner fighting alongside Clidamis, falls in love with Iris's poetry. He quickly leaves the front and Clidamis behind, in order to seduce Iris in her lover's absence. Anaxandre fails, and Iris and Clidamis are reunited at the narrative's end. Finally, in the after-note, Villedieu returns as narrator and finishes her tribute and justification to the *Dames de Bruxelles*.

The dedicatory letter establishes a relationship between the author and her characters, while promising a written justification that will "buy" the *Dames de Bruxelles*' good opinion. Right away, Villedieu makes it clear that she will defend herself against the bad opinion of the *Dames de Bruxelles*, yet her dedicatory letter is admittedly tongue-in-cheek. The confidence she exhibited in her original self-portrait is here, despite her recent rupture with Antoine. She is certain that she will win over the *Dames de Bruxelles*, and at times during the narrative, she calls *their* behavior into question by referring to them as the incredibly cold and prudish *Belles Insulaires/Insensibles*.

In the dedicatory letter addressed "Aux Dames de la cour de Bruxelles," Villedieu writes,

Je ne puis souffrir, Mesdames, que vous murmuriez contre moy plus long-temps;  
l'honneur de vostre bienveillance est trop précieux pour ne pas estre acheté par tout ce  
qui dépend de mon Génie; & puis qu'il ne faut qu'une Histoire de ma façon pour obtenir

ma grace de Vous, je vais satisfaire à la curiosité obligeante que vous témoignez pour mes Ouvrages. (*Anaxandre* i-ii)<sup>185</sup>

She has no doubt that a single story from her pen will dispel their reservations. Far from bowing to their magnanimity, she refuses their request for the conclusion to her 1661 unfinished work, *Alcidamie* (1661).<sup>186</sup> She claims, “cette Reyne a trop de timidité pour montrer son visage devant des Dames aussi éclairées que Vous . . . nous avons jugé elle & moy, qu’un jeune Heros auroit plus de grace à vous faire mes Complimens, qu’une Princesse déjà effacée,” (*Anaxandre* ii).

This “jeune Heros” is Anaxandre. In this instance, Villedieu is an economist of sorts and determines what best suits this particular literary market.<sup>187</sup> She anticipates her reader’s demands and provides them with an *homme galant* capable of buying the *bienveillance* of these ladies, while acknowledging changing literary tastes.

In this same gesture, Villedieu blurs the boundaries of reality and fiction, since she previously discussed her course of action with her character, Alcidamie. The author’s supposed

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<sup>185</sup> The citations are from the 1667 Ribou edition of *Anaxandre* available in an electronic version on the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* website, [www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr). The pages of the dedicatory letter are not numbered in the 1667 Ribou edition, so I have ascribed roman numerals to these sections of the text, with “i” referring to the first page with the dedicatory title, “Aux Dames de la Cour de Bruxelles.” In quotations from the 1667 Ribou edition of *Anaxandre*, I have selectively modernized the text’s orthography, in so much as it pertains to the printer’s use of “i” for “j,” as in “ie/je,” “u” for “v,” as in “covr/cour,” “avx/aux,” etc., in order to render the text more accessible to the modern reader. I have limited my changes to these two cases. Other variants, such as the use of “y” for “i,” as in “moy/moi,” the use of “es” for “ê,” as in “estre/être,” and the use of “oit” for “ait” as in “estoit/était” have not been altered.

<sup>186</sup> Alcidamie inhabits the *Isle Delicieuse* where she stays in exile because her daughter usurped the throne. One day, her son, whom she believes to be dead arrives on the *Isle Delicieuse*, and his servant, Muly, tells Alcidamie’s story: “Before the Queen, Haly’s mother, had yet given birth to him, her husband the King had died and she herself had been captured by her brother-in-law Almansor, who had seized the throne. Fearing that her son, if discovered, would be put to death, the Queen concealed the fact of his birth and had him secretly transported to an island where the sage Oraste and another disguised prince, Amador, were living and studying in idyllic peace. Young Haly . . . is reported dead, and the Queen’s daughter Zélide plans to occupy the throne. News that Haly still lives reaches Zélide and she conspires to have her brother murdered. . . . Then the prince, unwilling to contest his sister’s occupancy of the throne, causes his death to be announced” (Morrisette 45-46).

<sup>187</sup> According to Klein, *Alcidamie* was outdated in the public eye: “The author explains that she is not going to give the ladies ‘la suite des Aventures d’Alcidamie’ (her first novel never finished). She rationalizes that Alcidamie is ‘une Princesse déjà effacée,’ who no longer holds much attraction owing to ‘l’inconstance des Gens du Siècle.’ . . . The letter constitutes a critical commentary to validate and justify her literary initiatives” (Klein, *Female Protagonist* 92).

consultation with Alcidamie admits Villedieu into fictional space, while her address to the *Dames de Bruxelles* keeps her rooted in reality. This rhetorical sleight of hand encourages the reader to look for Villedieu as a character in her own text and prepares the audience's acceptance of the author's relationship to another character, Anaxandre. She consults him in the same way that she consulted Alcidamie. Her spokesman, Anaxandre, is a writer, too, but Villedieu makes it clear that her (the author's, and eventually Iris's) works are far superior to his own.

The *nouvelle*'s pre-text establishes Anaxandre's inferior participation in the literary economy by privileging the work of the woman writer, Iris. Anaxandre is a writer, and he successfully circulates his literary currency. In his pre-text addressed to the *Dames de Bruxelles*, whom he first dubs the *Illustres Dames*, he claims,

Je ne portois que des Madrigaux, des Billets doux, & des Chansonnettes: mais il est vray que cette monnoye est d'un grand cours parmy tous les Peuples qui reconnoissent l'empire de l'Amour. . . . elle vaut tout ce qu'on veut la faire valoir: elle me servit d'un fonds inépuisable pour fournir à la dépense que je faisois auprès des Belles, & elle avoit soutenu les frais de mes voyages pendant cinq ou six années. . . . (*Anaxandre* 4-5)

Obviously, Anaxandre has met with great literary and amorous success in the past, until he arrives on the *Isle des Vertus*. Literature is the currency that he trades in, yet he finds that his own verses are worthless to tempt the *Belles Insulaires* who dominate the *Isle des Vertus*—a place where he finds himself bereft of “financing.” Like Villedieu, Anaxandre needs to adjust his style in order to please his strict audience. The “notorious” woman author turns to Anaxandre, an *homme galant*, for he is more palatable as a spokesperson to the *Dames de Bruxelles*. Anaxandre, in turn, exploits the *Belles Insulaires*' interest in a heartfelt “Elegie en forme de Songe” written by the virtuous heroine, Iris.<sup>188</sup> Anaxandre seizes his chance and boldly

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<sup>188</sup> The elegy and other poems in *Anaxandre* are attributed to the fictional writer Iris, yet they were also published separately. “On la retrouvera, ainsi que les poésies suivantes, dans le *Nouveau recueil* [de quelques pièces galantes]



states, “De sorte que ne voulant pas perdre cette occasion d’entretenir mes belles Insensibles de tendresse & de galanterie, je leur fis le recit qu’elles me demandoient en ces termes” (*Anaxandre* 14-15).<sup>189</sup> Thanks to Iris’s elegy, he now has something of value to offer, and he begins the narrative of Iris and Clidamis—a narrative largely composed of Iris’s verses.<sup>190</sup>

Anaxandre explains that he desired to see Iris after he read her poems. While speaking with the *Belles Illustres*, Anaxandre explains the effect of Iris’s poetry, “Ces Vers me donnerent une envie furieuse de voir la Personne qui les avoit faits” (*Anaxandre* 48). His first vision of Iris is a stunning literary portrait that cleverly allegorizes the act of writing:

. . . les Dames de la Ville voulant solemnifer cette Feste à leur maniere, elles imaginerent une Course de Traîneaux. . . Chaque Dame s’y rendit dans un Traîneau peint & doré, & accompagné d’un Cavalier tres-proprement habillé : mais comme c’est d’Iris seule que je me suis chargé de vous entretenir, je ne vous parleray que de ce qui la regarde. Elle portoit le deuil en ce temps-là pour la mort d’une de ses Tantes, de sorte que son Traîneau estoit peint de noir, & semé de cœurs d’argent entremeslez de Jas d’Amours & de fleches croisées. Le Cheval qui le traînoit, & qui paroissoit tout superbe de servir à un usage si galant, estoit blanc comme la neige sur laquelle il marchoit ; il estoit orné d’une quantité prodigieuse de rubans noirs, meslez d’un petit cordonnet argent; & sa teste estoit ombragée d’un bouquet de plumes blanches & noires. Deux longues resnes de soye noire meslée d’argent, servoient à conduire l’animal, qui n’estoit gouverné que par les belles mains d’Iris seulement ; car soit qu’elle eut voulu faire mieux remarquer son adresse, ou qu’elle eut fait un scrupule de recevoir un Cavalier en l’absence de son Clidamis, elle estoit seule dans son Traîneau. . . Elle estoit vestuë d’un habit de drap noir. . . (*Anaxandre* 49-51)

I read this black and white scene as a rendition of the writing process. Her black accoutrements—her dress, the carriage, the horse’s reins—are the ink, and the snow is the page. The white horse with black trappings and “plumes” serves as intermediary between writer and page, since Iris’s hands alone control the reins. As she pulls the reins, the blank page springs

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de 1668” (Cuénin 248, n. 64). In fact, the scene of the women appreciating Iris’s elegy is a transparent enacting of Villedieu’s wish that the *Dames de Bruxelles* look favorably on her works.

<sup>189</sup> Anaxandre gives in to the ladies’ demands, whereas Villedieu did not. Anaxandre lacks the confidence in his own poetry to resist the ladies’ wishes.

<sup>190</sup> “Ce nom [Clidamis] figure dans *Clélie* . . . et désignait déjà Villedieu dans le *Recueil* de 1662” (Cuénin 248, n. 62).

into motion receiving her words. Not only does Iris's writing attract Anaxandre to her, but also her status as idealized writing woman eclipses her subjectivity. In this scene, Iris, despite driving her carriage alone, is no subject. She is an object—writing personified. Although the woman writer here is a great force, she has no identity beyond Anaxandre's valorization of her poetry. He narrates this scene and "paints" the writing woman as he would have her. As an individual, she is diminished in favor of the pretty verses that she composes. Even the decoration on her carriage, the hearts and Cupid's bow and arrows, reflect the passionate verses she writes to Clidamis.

Granted, this is not a typical objectification of woman, as is evidenced by Iris's unorthodox and active participation in a masculine pastime. Klein comments, "... the heroine's actions explicitly challenge the myth representing a woman's behavior as passive . . . Iris is in a position of strength racing horses, a behavior generally unsuitable for women in the seventeenth century" (*Female Protagonist* 100-101). Iris is as successful at racing horses as she is at winning admirers through her writing, "Il ne se fit pas une belle Course dont son Traîneau ne receut tout l'honneur ; il ne se proposa pas un prix qu'elle ne remportast" (*Anaxandre* 53). She surmounts passivity through her racing and writing, yet her own identity is eclipsed by her accomplishments. The parallel success of a woman's racing and writing violates *vraisemblance*. Iris must be stopped, and Anaxandre, Iris's inferior in writing (and probably in racing as well), restores order. His rendition of events slights Iris's ambition:

. . . elle commençoit à se faire autant d'adorateurs, comme il y avoit de spectateurs à cette Feste, lors que son Cheval ayant pris l'épouvante . . . il emporta le Traîneau jusques au plus épais d'un Bois qui accompagne ce Jardin ; & l'auroit brisé sans doute entre les Arbres, si je n'eusse esté assez heureux pour l'arrester. . . & presentant une de mes mains à Iris, pendant que je retenois son Cheval à l'autre : Voila ce que c'est, Madame, (luy-dis-je) de ne vouloir pas souffrir de Cavalier aupres de vous : Vous voyez comme ils sont quelquefois d'un grand secours ; & sans doute que si vostre cheval avoit esté

retenu par un bras plus vigoureux que le vostre, il ne vous auroit pas exposée au peril dont vous venez de sortir. (*Anaxandre* 54-55)

The narrator, Anaxandre, symbolically and literally restores social norms, asserting his authority in masculine endeavors—literally, horse racing and, figuratively, his control over her writing. Having seized his chance to enter into her service, he chastises Iris for racing on her own. According to Anaxandre, if a man guided her *cheval* (“un bras plus vigoureux que le vostre”), then she would not be in the present danger. His words are not those of a concerned savior; rather, Anaxandre admonishes Iris for her activities beyond prescribed feminine roles. Iris’s passionate verses seduced Anaxandre, but now that he meets her, he takes back control of his sentiment and endeavors to win her affection.

Anaxandre offers his hand to Iris, while he holds the reins of her horse with the other. His arm becomes the “bras plus vigoureux,” as he allegorically attempts to rein in Iris’s virile writing force, yet she never takes his hand in the narrative space, nor does she answer his reproach. He simply serves as the denouement to her participation in a socially unacceptable pursuit, the racing of horses and seductive writing. Klein comments,

Traditionally the strong hero rescues the fainting damsel in distress when a wild boar charges at her. In *Anaxandre*, the gallant young man rescues the damsel in distress, **but** while she participates in a horse race. . . This scene representing the male rescuing the heroine meets with traditional expectations of male and female roles, but is altered to include the inscription of a feminine specificity. (*Female Protagonist* 100-101)

If only Klein’s “feminine specificity” existed in Iris’s racing of horses and seductive writing. However, the “feminine specificity” of this scene—the active, virile Iris—fades from view after she is reabsorbed into socially acceptable feminine behavior through this easily identifiable literary trope—Anaxandre taking the reins. Even though Iris is not finished writing, her poems that remain simply eclipse her, as a subject, further. As I will show, Iris’s last poetic missive to Clidamis contrasts greatly with her elegy and other poems presented in *Anaxandre*. This final

text ultimately succumbs to *vraisemblance*, yet it is significant because it initiates the closing sequence of events that restores order. In this case and others, her subjectivity is eclipsed by the valorization of her poems in the public sphere. The uncontrolled circulation and public perception of her works ultimately define Iris.<sup>191</sup>

Iris's writing is more present in the text than she is, and her love poetry slips into the hands of a public far distanced from her own life. Iris, as a subject, does not stand a chance, but her writings succeed. Everyone likes her works, and they have value. Her poems circulate in two ways in this *nouvelle*. First, the public receives her private writing, an elegy and amorous verses with favor. Anaxandre narrates: "L'adieu de ces deux Amans fut digne de la tendresse de leurs coeurs; & l'absence de Clidamis fut une source inépuisable de Vers pour la charmante & spirituelle Iris. Ce fut en ce temps-là qu'elle fit l'Elegie qui a donné matiere au recit de cette Histoire; & comme Clidamis a beaucoup d'esprit. . ." (*Anaxandre* 35-36). Iris's elegy begins *Anaxandre's* "interior" narrative, and her *Vers* are so praiseworthy, that they facilitate this important transitional moment from pre-text to narrative. The elegy, however, is not enough to keep the story going, and Anaxandre obtains more of Iris's love poetry from one of her friends:

. . . elle me montra des Vers de sa façon qu'elle luy avoit dérobez, que je trouvay le plus beaux que j'eusse veu de ma vie. Bien que la briefveté où je me suis assujetty, semble me defendre de mesler beaucoup de Vers dans ce Recit; ceux dont je parle sont si admirables, que je ne puis m'empescher de vous les redire; & ils m'ont fait faire des choses si injustes, qu'elles ne peuvent estre excusées par celle mesme qui les a causées. Voicy donc quels ils estoient. (*Anaxandre* 38)

Not only is Iris's elegy the reason Anaxandre tells the story, but also he capitalizes on Iris's popularity with the *Dames Illustres* by including so much of her poetry in the narrative. Viewed thus, Anaxandre "cashes in" on Iris's writing to win over his audience.

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<sup>191</sup> For a discussion of *vraisemblance* (plausibility) and the related notion of *bienséance* (propriety), see Beasley *Revising Memory* 234-235.

The second way in which her writing circulates in this *nouvelle* is through Anaxandre himself. The jealous Anaxandre intercepts her letters to her lover, Clidamis:

Je me faisois écrire de faux avis de cette inconstance prétendue, que je faisois passer par les mains d'Iris, sans qu'elle pût soupçonner que j'y eusse aucune part ; & quand elle voulut témoigner son ressentiment à Clidamis par ses Lettres, je mis si bon ordre à ne luy en laisser recevoir aucune, qu'il fut trois mois entiers sans avoir de nouvelles de sa Maistresse. Je n'apportois moins de soin à luy cacher celles de son Amant ; & s'il y en avoit quelqu'une qui parvint jusques à elle, c'estoit quelque Lettre contrefaite, qui estoit plus propre à la confirmer dans son erreur, qu'à la desabuser. (*Anaxandre* 59-60)

He falsifies or forges his own responses to Iris's love letters in Clidamis's name. However, Anaxandre's interference and rewriting of Iris's lover's letters is ineffectual. His writing is as worthless in this literary economy as it is on the *Isle des Vertus*. No matter how he tries to change Iris's feelings toward her lover and write Clidamis's supposed infidelity, he does not succeed. He states, ". . . mon éloquence estoit inutile" (*Anaxandre* 66). Iris's resolve is unshakable, and Anaxandre repeats her words for the *Belles Illustres*: ". . . ce que je nie fortement, c'est qu'il soit louable de changer quand un Homme change, & d'autoriser sa legereté en suivant son exemple" (*Anaxandre* 65). She is a virtuous heroine to a fault, loyal to her "faithless" lover despite Anaxandre's temptations.

After the horseracing scene and Anaxandre's subsequent attempts to seduce Iris, her writing only appears once more in the narrative. It appears under the title, "Lettre d'Iris à son infidelle Clidamis," and poetry mixes with prose (*Anaxandre* 69). Iris follows her poetic musings on Clidamis with prose considerations of those sentiments. Through the prose interpretations, she clearly remains faithful to Clidamis, despite Anaxandre's efforts to seduce her.

Once again, Iris's writing drives the narrative. Anaxandre discovers this letter and carefully substitutes a response to Iris detailing his own love in the hopes that she will find it.

This time, it is his *cheval* that runs amuck, in the form of the letter declaring his love for Iris. Through a series of events worthy of the galant tale, the letter is mistakenly sent to Clidamis who returns to confront Iris, and the two lovers are quickly reconciled. In the end, Anaxandre's writing accomplishes the opposite of his intended purpose, for Iris and Clidamis are reunited. However, like Villedieu and Antoine, they are not married, as *vraisemblance* would normally dictate.<sup>192</sup> Anaxandre, bereft of any literary currency of his own, is left to wait on the *Isle des Vertus* until Villedieu calls for him to tell his story, filled with Iris's verses, to the *Dames de Bruxelles*. Iris is easily forgotten, while her verses live on.

By presenting such a virtuous heroine possessed with writing talents and a life story that resonates with her own, Villedieu places the finishing touches on the justification addressed to the *Dames de Bruxelles*. Iris's story presents the woman writer as an ever-faithful heroine resistant to all the temptations of Anaxandre who trades in her verses. With Iris, Villedieu even idealizes the events of her own life. I will trace this idealization using Iris's elegy and the autobiographical hints present in *Anaxandre*.

Iris's elegy is in dialogue with the defensive stance of the dedicatory letter and transcends the pre-text in which Anaxandre presents Iris's elegy. In its erotic reverie Iris's elegy recalls Villedieu's first popular work, "Jouissance." Villedieu's inclusion of a young girl writing a passionate elegy indicates that the prudish *Dames de Bruxelles* had seen Villedieu's sonnet and heard Tallemant's description of her tempestuous love affair with Antoine. No doubt the story of the sonnet's composition and the love that inspired it was still the most popular marker of Villedieu's reputation, despite her forays into more respectable genres like drama. Couched in

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<sup>192</sup> "The closure does not include marriage as the final resolution to the love adventure" (Klein, *Female Protagonist* 101).

the form of dream, Iris's elegy does not violate *bienséance*, unlike Villedieu's doubly taboo sonnet, "Jouissance," which used a genre reserved for men and described erotic pleasure.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, the opening of this tale is an idealized description of the actual romance between Villedieu and Antoine. After a ball, young Iris becomes a poet. Anaxandre comments, "Peut-estre vous semblera-t'il surprenant, Mesdames, que l'Amour ait fait un Poète en si peu de temps d'une Personne de l'âge & du sexe d'Iris : mais c'est le propre de cette passion de faire de ces sortes de metamorphoses" (*Anaxandre* 30-31).

Beginning with the presentation of Iris's elegy, her writings hold a privileged place in *Anaxandre*. The *nouvelle* offers an ideal portrait of the woman writer who is ultimately untouched by the indiscretion of others or by class woes. A female poet's purloined verses/love letters circulate freely in *Anaxandre*, but the poetess does not know this, and her writings are viewed positively. No ill effects result from the exposure of her verses, for she remains faithful to Clidamis and the *Belles Illustres* appreciate her poetry. Granted, Iris's circulated writings define and overshadow her subjectivity, but in this case, at least her works reflect positively on the writing woman.

Idealized episodes like these link Villedieu to the ideal woman writer Iris in a sort of wish-fulfillment scenario. Villedieu proves herself to be worthy of the adoration of even the most moral ladies through her *writing*. The surprising conclusion to the *nouvelle* emphasizes this idea. After comparing the ladies and men of the Brussels court to those in the story (but emphasizing that they are better than the characters of course), Villedieu writes,

Il ne manque plus qu'un seul objet à la matiere de toutes ses admirations; mais ce tresor caché est trop precieux pour estre communiqué à un miserable Etranger comme luy

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<sup>193</sup> Klein comments, "The dream transcends the boundaries of acceptable female modes of behavior that privilege virtue and a sense of *pudeur*. At the same time, the dream transports the reader into a world of physical "jouissement" that banishes the control of 'bienséance'" (96).

[Anaxandre], & il doit loïer avec tout les reste de son Sexe, de ce qu'une Personne si parfaite & pour les beautez de l'Ame, & pour celles du corps, est cachée aux yeux de tous les Hommes du Monde; car sans cette prudente précaution, ce Soleil éclatant auroit embrasé tous ceux qui auroient eu l'audace de souffrir la lumiere de ses rayons.  
(*Anaxandre* 82-83)<sup>194</sup>

The "Soleil," the woman behind Iris's identity, is undoubtedly Villedieu. I read this last sentence as Villedieu's final triumph over the *Dames de Bruxelles* and public opinion. She refers to herself, and her writings are more than the product of a notorious woman taking on a man's role. Her works place her in a new literary space, which women can appreciate. Other women can aspire to this space. However, due to their privileged sexual place, men are necessarily excluded from this revelation. Here, Villedieu asks the *Dames de Bruxelles* to celebrate a woman's writings in the public sphere, rather than reinforcing the status quo by ostracizing her.

At the end of *Anaxandre*, Villedieu reserves a literary space for women separate from men. She acknowledges that when women's texts circulate, the virtue present in loyal passionate verses is lost. Men do not understand the value of such verses, for they focus on the superficial. This reference at the end of *Anaxandre* resonates with her self-portrait by centering her identity in her writing, and by dissociating from her "self." In her self-portrait, Marie Catherine writes, "j'ose dire que j'aurois bien plus d'avantage de montrer mon âme que mon corps, et mon esprit que mon visage. . ." (*Portrait* 224). In this *nouvelle*, I believe Villedieu manages just that, to create an ideal written image of her *âme* and *esprit*, Iris, while dispensing with the reality of her own less than ideal personal appearance and bourgeois class.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> In Klein's work, *The Female Protagonist in the Nouvelles of Madame de Villedieu*, one finds the only transcribed version of *Anaxandre* from the original version (it was omitted from her *Œuvres Complètes*), yet this selection seems to be transcribed without key passages. Further research will determine if the electronic Ribou version available from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Ribou version used by Klein (located in the Olin Library at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, at the time of Klein's publication) offer such disparities, and if so, why. For the present analysis, the BN version of the Ribou text is used because the electronic text offers a more complete version of the *nouvelle*.

<sup>195</sup> See note 176.



After writing *Anaxandre*, Villedieu's life took a disastrous turn. Two important events occurred during the interval from March to June 1667 that would have a lasting impact on Villedieu's life. Antoine married, left for war, and sold Villedieu's private love letters to her publisher, Claude Barbin.<sup>196</sup> Villedieu did not give permission to publish her letters, yet they

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<sup>196</sup> Some question exists whether Villedieu knew about these events while writing *Anaxandre*, although she likely did not. In order to interpret *Anaxandre* as a reflection of Villedieu's own experiences, it is imperative to establish a sort of chronology of events that preceded her composition of this *nouvelle*. In addition, any critic wishing to analyze this work is forced to make a decision, placing Villedieu's knowledge of certain key events either before or after the *nouvelle*'s composition. In an attempt to do just that, I have reconstructed the year 1667 based on Micheline Cuénin's authoritative study and on various historical documents.

In chronologies presented of Villedieu's life, discrepancies exist concerning the years of 1667 to 1668. I believe that many chronologies published in works after Cuénin's study are based on the one presented on pages 17-19 of Cuénin's text, and reproduce a typo that places the publication of *Anaxandre*, Villedieu's stay at the spa, and Antoine's death in 1668, not 1667. Cuénin's text offers the correct dates (despite another error on page 248 that dates *Anaxandre* 1663); thus, I have presented here dates found in the pages in Cuénin's study (not those in her succinct chronology offered on pages 17-19 of her text) or dates found in the *privilèges* themselves. In critical texts or editions published after Cuénin's study, I have adjusted dates to those presented in Cuénin's text.

Before his May departure, Antoine purportedly left Villedieu's publisher a copy of her private love letters. As early as May 25, 1667, Villedieu knew about Barbin's desire to publish her letters, as she wrote a letter (that is assumed to be) to Claude Barbin, her publisher, refusing his request. However, in July, she received word that Barbin decided not to respect her wishes and planned to publish the letters anyway (see Cuénin 48-49). The *privilège* for *Lettres et Billets Galants* was granted on June 6 without Villedieu's knowledge just seven days prior to the *privilège* for *Anaxandre* dated June 13, 1667.

Since Villedieu was in Brussels in March, and the work is dedicated to the *dames de Bruxelles* (ladies of Brussels), she likely finished the work well before the *privilège* for *Lettres et Billets Galants* was issued in mid-June, thus, well before she would have any news about the imminent publication of her private letters. In any case, with a space of only seven days between Barbin's clandestine *privilège* and the official one for *Anaxandre*, it is not likely that the news of the *Lettres et Billets Galants* could have reached Antoine before *Anaxandre* was published on June 20. Indications from the text reveal that even if she did know about the letters, she writes herself as someone who does not.

I do not view the circulation of Iris's poetic love letters as Villedieu's rendering of the circulation of her purloined love letters, (although inviting interpretive possibilities readily present themselves). The chronology, as established by Cuénin and historical documents, simply does not support this possibility.

In May 1667, Antoine supposedly married another woman (presumably for financial reasons), and shortly after left for war. [This is the date Cuénin gives, but it is an estimate at best (see Cuénin, n. 94).] As for Villedieu's knowledge of the marriage, pre-publication, the end of the work itself writes against that possibility since the lovers, although temporarily parted, reunite, and the characters involved are the lovers Iris and Clidamis, pseudonyms used for Villedieu and Antoine. As Nancy Klein points out, the *nouvelle* does not end in marriage, but the lovers are reunited after a period of separation (*The Female Protagonist* 101). Villedieu was accustomed to separations from Antoine, and she had been engaged to him off and on until their break in February 1667. In fact, the contract freeing Antoine from his marriage promise to Villedieu cites particularly the date of June 21, 1664 as the day the two lovers decided to pledge themselves to one another. Additionally, he had made an earlier promise after they first met which he had subsequently broken (see Cuénin 45, n. 93). It is likely that she still held out hope for a reconciliation when she wrote *Anaxandre*. Once again, even if she did know, she writes as an oblivious lover still hoping for reconciliation. Villedieu's ignorance of Antoine's marriage and the circulation of her private love letters during the composition of *Anaxandre* precludes certain interpretive possibilities when drawing parallels between Desjardins and her text, yet this does not interfere with the current analysis and enhances the relevance of the idealism of *Anaxandre*, even though it is written as a defense against slander.

appeared in print in early 1668, under the title *Lettres et Billets Galants*. To make matters worse, Antoine died at the siege of Lille in August of the same year, and she lost her court case in Holland placing her in a dire financial situation.<sup>197</sup>

Considering she wrote the *Mémoires* in the years following Antoine's death in which she faced the publication of her private letters and severe financial difficulties, it is no wonder that the work's two major themes are the misinterpretation of private events by an unforgiving public and the bearing of class on the heroine's fate.<sup>198</sup> These themes take us back to Villedieu's self-portrait in which she complained of her class and also of those who would maliciously ruin the reputation of others.

I will read parts of the *Mémoires* as a reflection on her own life events, rather than an exact rendition thereof, with the hope of extracting lessons learned and imparted by this embattled author.<sup>199</sup> The ultimate goal is to identify how Villedieu separates the heroine's identity from her texts and values the protagonist's subjectivity *over* that which she writes, effectively reversing *Anaxandre*'s textual economy in which Iris's poems eclipse the worth of their author. Reading the *Mémoires* in conjunction with *Anaxandre* will evidence how the

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<sup>197</sup> Her father also died during 1667.

<sup>198</sup> The question is how far one should go with such thinking. It is necessary to mention here that there are two critical camps concerning the *Mémoires*, those who see it as autobiography and those who reject this conclusion. The critical debate has been a long one, and ultimately it is a question with no definitive answer. Like the events surrounding the publication of *Anaxandre*, one simply has to look at the facts and take an informed position. Certainly, there are passages and references that seem straight from the author's life, yet many events are simply too picaresque to be reality itself, although they might be based on romanticized real events. This is not unfamiliar to the careful reader of Villedieu's texts. After all, the story of Iris and Clidamis is certainly an "extremely romanticized version" of the events of Villedieu's own relationship with Antoine (Klein, *Female Protagonist* 100). Additionally, memoirs were a genre reserved for the aristocracy and historical/political figures until Villedieu decided to write the fictionalized chronicle of a common woman whose birth, shrouded in mystery with hints of a serendipitous noble association, had no definite identifiable roots in the upper classes. Although she managed to slip her self-portrait in the pages of a genre usually reserved for the aristocracy, she could hardly have been expected to write memoirs of her own life, as her patroness, the duchesse de Nemours, did at the time of the *Mémoires*' composition. Perhaps, in her own way, this was Villedieu's method of circumventing convention, disguising and justifying the events of her life in such a way that only those who knew her life story and work could see her clearly amidst the myriad images of a picaresque heroine living in a hyperbolic world.

<sup>199</sup> Autobiographical indications are catalogued by Cuénin on pages 251-259.

woman's writings are devalued while the woman is valorized. As I will show, the writing female subject and her texts will not come together as one in the same work until Villedieu's *Les désordres de l'amour*.

### ***Mémoires de la vie d'Henriette Sylvie de Molière***

Villedieu published this work anonymously, and the narrative itself identifies Sylvie as the writer of letters to her esteemed patroness, referred to as *Madame* or *Altesse*. Likely, the *dédicataire* was the Duchesse de Nemours.<sup>200</sup> The *Mémoires* begin with a "Fragment d'une lettre,"<sup>201</sup> a letter from the writer or submitter of the work to the publisher. It is impossible to identify the letter's author further, except to say that the writer has been published and sarcastically regrets the fallout from publication: "Je ne vais pas ainsi dans une ville [Paris] où j'ai eu la folie de consentir qu'on me fit imprimer" (*Mémoires* 42).<sup>202</sup> The author's experience is reflected in the rhetoric used to address the publisher: "Mais parlons d'autre chose : que votre libraire m'embarrasse avec ce qu'il me demande ; est-ce qu'il ne peut rien faire sans cela? et puis de quoi veut-il que je lui compose une préface, je n'ai plus rien à dire aux lecteurs, et j'ai tout dit en leur abdonnant la belle histoire que vous faites imprimer" (*Mémoires* 42). Emphasizing that there is nothing more to say, this writer confidently questions the publisher's judgment.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Cuénin notes, "... la mystérieuse dédicataire des *Mémoires de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* n'est autre que la duchesse de Nemours. Le texte montre en effet que celle-ci est une amie de longue date; le récit abonde en allusions à leurs souvenirs communs et en plaisanteries complices qui supposent un commerce déjà ancien; le fait qu'il s'agisse d'une princesse étrangère ne ruine pas cette hypothèse, au contraire : Marie de Longueville était souveraine de Neuchâtel, et épouse d'un prince de la maison de Savoie. Enfin, la duchesse, elle-même auteur de *Mémoires* composés environ à cette date, a fort bien pu encourager Marie-Catherine à écrire les siens, en guise de contrepoint plaisant" (77-78).

<sup>201</sup> Hereafter, this letter is referred to as the "fragment" or "introductory fragment."

<sup>202</sup> Curiously, the letter has no grammatical or semantic marker of the writer's sex. We assume this is a woman's voice because this "fragment d'une lettre" is the introductory letter to a woman's memoirs, and the writer is traveling with another woman. Additionally, we know Villedieu to be the author of the text, and the letter itself is a missive from the writer/submitter to the male publisher. Perhaps this was simply another way that Villedieu distanced the author from the text, making the conflation of life and writing even more difficult.

<sup>203</sup> Conversely, the author's comments concerning her publications could be a pose of modesty.

This *fragment* is not important to understand the text. It does not reveal anything new and is devalued in the eyes of the author. The reader imagines the frustrated publisher including this *fragment* in place of the desired preface. Interpreted thus, this is the first instance in this text in which a woman's writing is appropriated in the *Mémoires*. In an ironic twist, the letter destined to prevent a preface, becomes that preface. It initiates a textual economy in which women's writings have little narrative value and are rarely used as intended.<sup>204</sup>

This "fragment d'une lettre" is not vital to the narrative and is hastily written as a reluctant afterthought. It contrasts sharply with the text that follows. Sylvie's *Mémoires* are a justification of her life, while in the introductory *fragment*, the author/submitter of the memoirs claims that no external/additional justification of the text is necessary: "D'ailleurs je ne vois pas que son livre exige une grande justification ; et si je n'ai pu me dispenser d'y parler de quelques personnes vivantes, je crois qu'il n'y en a pas une, qui en un besoin, me pardonnerait volontiers la liberté que j'ai prise, et à tout événement, je serai le garant de l'ouvrage de ce côté-là" (*Mémoires* 42).<sup>205</sup> This *fragment* features an enigmatic voice: is it the author or is it her character speaking, or both? Both are writers, although we know few details of Sylvie's other writings, save what she presents in her memoirs. Is it fact or fiction?

If Sylvie writes the *fragment*, the *Mémoires* become, in the narrative space at least, real life written by the person who lived them. Viewed this way, the letter lends an aura of credibility

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<sup>204</sup> Obviously, the *Mémoires* themselves would not exist if not for the woman writing them. When I speak of women's writings in the *Mémoires*, I specifically mean those that are set off from the main narrative—those that are presented as separate entities, as Iris's elegy and poetry/letters in *Anaxandre*. I want to explore their function and value in the overarching narrative of Sylvie's life.

<sup>205</sup> Surprisingly, the incongruity here between *son livre* and *je* reveals yet another enigmatic element of this "Fragment d'une lettre." Two possible perspectives are of interest. The first is that this is just an accidental slip of the pen. After all, the letter's content indicates that it was written in haste. In this line of thinking, author and character are one and the same, and the slip was "accidental." The second is that this is a deliberate action. If so, then the dedicatory letter's author has designs on concealing her identity, yet encourages the conflation of her identity with that of her character's—a character who might or might not be Villedieu.

to the work that is reinforced by the names of actual persons from the time, like Villedieu's benefactor Hugues de Lionne. If Villedieu writes the *fragment*, the story is not entirely her own. There are elements that indicate that the memoirs have autobiographical leanings, yet they are concealed under layers of picaresque story-telling and events that find no place in any account of Villedieu's life. Indeed, if this is a *roman à clef*, the key to the author's and the protagonist's identities remains a mystery. Villedieu leaves the reader guessing. The author surrounds her protagonist with contemporary references and people, but veils Sylvie's and her own identity in fiction. This act is sealed by the author's choice to publish this text anonymously. Villedieu leaves us to ponder her work and to read with caution the visions of herself that move perpetually in and out of focus.

The anonymous introductory *fragment* of the *Mémoires* contrasts sharply with *Anaxandre*'s dedicatory letter. The *fragment* does not drive the narrative, nor offer any definitive evidence as to the writer's identity. Villedieu wrote the dedicatory letter of *Anaxandre* as a self-defense of the independent woman writer, while the *fragment* of the *Mémoires* devalues publishing and sarcastically refers to those who would allow their writings to circulate publicly. Instead of taking a defensive stance, the *Mémoires* introductory *fragment* firmly states that no justification of the text (or its author for that matter) is needed because the work is complete in itself. Villedieu does not consult her characters directly like she did in *Anaxandre*; rather, she sublimates herself into Sylvie. The text is to stand on its own, without recourse to a dedicatory preface or the author's identity, whereas in *Anaxandre*, Villedieu clearly states in the dedicatory letter that her narrative has power to justify her actions in the eyes of those who judge her, the *Dames de Bruxelles*. Additionally, the *fragment* itself raises questions of authorship, turning the

writer of Sylvie's text into a chimera that simultaneously invites comparisons between author and character and simultaneously dispels those associations.

Only in the *Mémoires*' first pages do faint echoes of *Anaxandre*'s dedicatory letter appear, but the register is different. Sylvie, the protagonist, claims that she will write to justify her actions and correct misconceptions about her life; hence, Sylvie's defensive statement is found in the narrative's beginning: "Ce ne m'est pas un légère consolation, Madame, au milieu de tant de médisances qui déchirent ma réputation partout, que Votre Altesse désire que je me justifie. J'en ai les sentiments que je dois, et pour n'en être ingrate, j'obéirai volontiers au commandement qu'elle me fait de la divertir, par un récit fidèle de mes erreurs innocentes" (*Mémoires* 43). Although Sylvie sets out to defend herself by writing, just like Villedieu in *Anaxandre*'s dedicatory letter, Sylvie's tone is different. Sylvie is not confident that she will succeed: "Non que j'espère jamais pouvoir arracher des esprits les cruelles impressions que la calomnie a données de ma conduite : le siècle ne permet pas que je me flatte de cette pensée. . . . il viendra un temps, où on ajoutera peut-être plus de foi à ce que j'aurai écrit de l'innocence de mes actions, qu'à ce qu'en auront pu dire mes ennemis" (*Mémoires* 43). However, Sylvie envisions a time when her writing will be worth more than slander—a time when her writing will be accepted as truth. Sylvie's wish seems to contradict the introductory *fragment*'s theme of devaluing the circulated written word, yet Sylvie's thoughts are written in a future tense, whereas the pessimistic comments of the *fragment* stemmed from the past. Here, the writer, Sylvie, envisions a time when her writing will be something more than fuel for gossip, but in the century in which she lives, she knows that there is no hope. Writing, in Sylvie's present, remains ineffective as a means of expressing the truth of the author's intentions in the public sphere. As in the *Mémoires*' introductory *fragment*, the woman writer's inability to control the reception and

interpretation of her texts devalues their importance. Ultimately, writings made public betray their intended purpose and reinforce public misconception.<sup>206</sup>

After Sylvie's pseudo-dedicatory letter, she begins her tale with a literary portrait. As she describes herself: "on peut s'imaginer que je suis quasi une beauté achevée, depuis la tête jusqu'aux pieds. Ceux qui ont vu ce que j'en laisse voir, témoigneront que je ne me farde pas" (*Mémoires* 44). A beautiful heroine appears, but the circumstances of her birth are unknown. Peasants raise her until serendipitous events place her with a family of higher social standing, the Molières. Sylvie's social standing and social mobility are major features of the narrative. In line to inherit her adoptive parents' estate, Sylvie's adventures soon threaten her newfound social status.

In fact, Sylvie's first adventure to send her fate spinning out of control and makes her story public is the result of a hunting outing with her family. Sylvie describes herself in the *Mémoires*, "J'avais aussi une grande passion pour la chasse, et enfin jusque-là on n'avait guère vu de fille mépriser, comme moi, dès l'âge de dix ans, tous les divertissements du sexe, pour monter à cheval, tirer un pistolet, ou faire quelque autre semblable exercice" (*Mémoires* 47).<sup>207</sup> Her adoptive father, Monsieur de Molière, informs her that she is not his daughter and attempts to rape her. Sylvie shoots him and flees the scene, only to encounter a wild boar:

Ô Dieu ! quelle fut alors mon affliction, et quand à cette disgrâce, il se mêla encore la peur d'un sanglier qui était chassé, et qui traversa en même temps cette route presque sur les pieds de mon cheval ! Il me souvient que malgré toute ma surprise, je ne laissai pas de mettre la main au pistolet qui me restait, . . . Monsieur de Birague qui vit de loin mon action, et qui crut que je n'étais là venue à toute bride, qu'à dessein d'y rencontrer la bête

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<sup>206</sup> DeJean comments, ". . . tales of female passion that portray the woman who dares to place herself in an authorial position . . . [resulted in] an extratextual loss of authority or an invasion of the privacy of the woman writer responsible for the transcription of the story" ("Lafayette's Ellipses" 886).

<sup>207</sup> Looking back to Villedieu's portrait, at the girl who shunned the activities of her sex and *particularly* adored hunting, Sylvie mimics the author's preferences, as she hunts with her adoptive father. This passage echoes the words Villedieu wrote in her own portrait: "La passion dominante de mon sexe ne me touche point. J'aime mieux la chasse que la cour. . ." (*Portrait* 224).

au passage, fit un grand cri pour me reprocher ma témérité, et s'avancant vers moi au grand galop. . . . (*Mémoires* 49-50)<sup>208</sup>

Sylvie's behavior is not typical. According to Donna Kuizenga, "It was not uncommon for women to participate in hunts during the early modern period, although they often did not participate in the kill. Sylvie's passion for hunting and her willingness to defend herself are not, however, stereotypical female behavior at this time" (Kuizenga 29, n. 10). Sylvie, her adoptive father's prey, becomes the hunter and subsequently shoots her foster father and instinctively tries to kill the boar. As Kuizenga observes, "Heroes in early modern novels often prove their prowess by confronting an enraged wild boar. Here Sylvie passes this test of male heroism" (31, n. 12). Despite her prowess, Sylvie is still a woman, and her actions place her in a precarious position.

Shooting her father flings Sylvie into a dangerous world. In order to circulate in this world, a price must be paid. It is the Marquis de Birague, her foster mother's lover, who comes to her rescue. Believing she is powerless, valueless, without her adoptive family's support, Sylvie throws herself on Birague's mercy and reveals all. As soon as he learns that Sylvie is not his mistress's daughter, he begins to desire her. Sylvie, in a bind, decides not to shoot Birague like she shot her (foster) father. Instead, she accepts his aid out of a difficult situation:

Au reste la nouveauté de l'aventure m'acquies entièrement le cavalier, et il dona mille louanges à mon action, au lieu de la blâmer ; me fit cent protestations de service ; et enfin, Madame, il me parla comme un homme qui me trouvait belle, et qui commençait à savoir que je n'étais pas fille de sa maîtresse ; je dirai cela sans lui faire tort. Je m'en aperçus bien dès le moment ; mais la nécessité de mettre quelque'un dans mes intérêts, fit que je ne voulus pas faire un second meurtre, pour me venger des espérances qu'il conçut peut-être alors à mon désavantage. Bien loin de cela, je le remerciai de sa générosité, j'eus pour lui honnêtement toutes les complaisances que je pus ; et j'oserai dire qu'une semblable rencontre était la seule qui pouvait jamais m'accoutumer à souffrir une

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<sup>208</sup> Monsieur de Birague is the lover of Sylvie's foster-mother, Mme de Molière. He transfers his attentions to Sylvie when he realizes that Sylvie is not his lover's real daughter.



déclaration d'amour sans colère, tant j'en étais ennemie mortelle auparavant. (*Mémoires* 52-53)

In that instant, she realizes that her beauty brings unwanted admirers, but she can also use it to save herself. By accepting Birague's aid, she knowingly initiates herself into an economy of appearances, which affords her some value in society.

Once again, a comparison of Iris and Sylvie reveals an evolution that devalues women's status as linked to her writings. In both works, the heroine is beautiful. Sylvie explains this best when she writes, "Ceux qui ne m'ont pas vue croiront, s'ils le veulent, que je me peins ainsi à plaisir ; ils aimeront toujours mieux l'idée d'une belle personne que celle d'une laide, ou ils seront gens de mauvais goût ; je dit toutefois la vérité. . ." (*Mémoires* 44). Even when dressed as a man, her beauty astounds those she wishes to manipulate.

A beautiful heroine was the order of the day in the seventeenth century. Villedieu was not beautiful. She candidly admits in her self portrait, "Je dirai donc que j'ai la physionomie heureuse et spirituelle, les yeux noirs et petits, mais pleins de feu ; la bouche grande, mais les dents belles pour ne rendre pas son ouverture désagréable ; le teint aussi beau que peut l'être un reste de petite vérole maligne" (*Portrait* 224). In her portrait, Villedieu privileged brains over beauty, but in the *Mémoires*, beauty is paramount.<sup>209</sup> Villedieu gave her readers what they expected in *Anaxandre* as well as the *Mémoires*, yet the beauty of her heroines is more than just literary convention. Each heroine's appearance has special significance when associated with the value of the woman writing in each text.

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<sup>209</sup> Villedieu's choice to present beautiful heroines like Iris and Sylvie could be a sort of wish-fulfillment on her part.

The two protagonists are writers, one of love poetry, the other of a defense of her entire public life.<sup>210</sup> Iris's beauty is a reflection of her measured poetry. In Iris, physical beauty and the beauty of the mind and spirit are equal, and her verses have value in a textual economy dominated by literary exchange. For Sylvie, beauty has a significance that is not connected to her writing. Sylvie's public worth is in appearances only, and her appearance is so fluid that she materializes as a prince one moment and assumes another woman's identity the next. Therefore, Sylvie's prose is unmeasured expression, prone to all sorts of digressions. In the *Mémoires* the woman writer's work is useless in an economy that limits women's marketability to the physical realm, not an ideal, intellectual one.

The different roles that Iris's and Sylvie's beauty play and how that beauty relates to their writing are manifest in the idealized horseracing scene of *Anaxandre* and the gritty boar scene of the *Mémoires*. The scenes are linked, for both Sylvie and Iris engage in activities usually reserved for men. Sylvie hunts, while Iris races, and men come to their rescue. The circumstances surrounding the instant that control is lost distinguish Sylvie's and Iris's experience. In order to show the relative importance of these scenes to each character's subjectivity, I will compare Sylvie's and Iris's actions just prior to and after they pass their respective tests of male heroism.

Iris chooses to race alone in the dreamlike atmosphere provided by the snow-covered backdrop, and at first, she is in control. She wins many races before her steed goes astray and Anaxandre rescues her. Iris's idealized beauty and composure, as she allegorically represents the ideal writer's creative process, stands in stark contrast to Sylvie's disheveled state when she encounters the boar. For Sylvie, events are out of control from the start. She has just shot her

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<sup>210</sup> I say "public" because Sylvie writes, ". . . mais mon dessein est de ne parler ici que de ce qu'a vu le grand monde. . ." (*Mémoires* 47).

foster father who tried to rape her. However, the event that spins her life out of control is freeing for Sylvie. Wise observes:

The import of the scene, however, lies in the fact that parricide—social if not biological—punctuates Sylvie’s move from passive item in a commodities exchange to active capitalist. When Sylvie kills her “father,” she violates family structure to (at least) the same degree as Molière. In out-financing the financier, she thus frees herself from his control of the market. (Wise 139)

Freed of one market, Sylvie is bound to seek another to survive. Although her first instinct is to disappear unseen, she encounters two obstacles that she has not sought: the boar and the Marquis de Birague.

Iris’s writings may be of a more polished style than Sylvie’s, but that does not mean that Iris necessarily has the upper hand in this comparison. After all, Iris loses control of her horse and *needs* Anaxandre to save her.<sup>211</sup> Her savior, attracted by her beauty, both intellectual and physical, clandestinely knows her writings, and later uses them to exploit her. She no longer controls the situation or her writings because he knows more than she.

By contrast, Sylvie, though unnerved, never really loses control of her horse, and even draws her gun to kill the boar.<sup>212</sup> She reveals the shocking events to her savior, and from this revelation, the boundaries prohibiting his desire for her dissolve. She understands this clearly, but she is willing to acquiesce to his desire, at least in words, as it is her only recourse. This time it is the man who is in the dark, who does not know something that Sylvie does, and this time, it is her physical beauty alone that buys her sanctuary.

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<sup>211</sup> Iris loses control of her horse, just as she lost control over her writings, as they were circulated publicly without her knowledge.

<sup>212</sup> This rendition of a woman stepping outside accepted feminine roles is coarse, with rough edges, as one can almost hear the gunshots and smell the attacking boar. This coarseness lends realism to the scene. Sylvie is not prancing calmly through the snow communing with her muse; she is fleeing for her own life. With Sylvie, the idealism from Villedieu’s earlier portrait of the woman writer is gone.

In this comparison, Sylvie, whose value is not centered in her status as writer, obviously has the upper hand. Sylvie and Iris circulate in two very different economies. The beauty they share only goes skin-deep in the *Mémoires*, yet Sylvie exercises more control over her circumstances. An economy in which a woman's status as writer has little value prevails, as Sylvie finds success and increased social status by exploiting her appearance and wit, not her writing.

Sylvie is forced to exploit her beauty and wit because she had no other "financing." Once the link with her foster family is severed, Sylvie has nothing. She is alone in the world, and a single woman with no money had few options. Sylvie may be an ideal beauty, but her social circumstances reflect Villedieu's own financial struggles in a way that Iris did not.

Villedieu omitted the question of class from *Anaxandre*. Klein comments,

. . . the tale of *Anaxandre* gracefully transcends the politics of family, wealth, and rank. The obstacles to the love between Iris and Clidamis originate in the all powerful social criterion of *bienséance*, underscoring the fundamental problem confronting Mme de Villedieu in the dedicatory letter and by extension, her spokesman Anaxandre in the pre-text. (*Female Protagonist* 99)

Whereas this *nouvelle* focuses primarily on correcting misconceptions in an ideal, receptive world, the *Mémoires* added a new dimension, that of class, to Villedieu's concerns about the conflation of a woman's life and writing. After all, Villedieu was not of the class for which she wrote, and by the time she wrote the *Mémoires*, she had suffered severe financial hardship, having lost her case in Holland, and witnessed her hopes for marriage and some financial solvency die with the man she loved.<sup>213</sup> In addition, her indebted father had died, while her mother, presumably unable to keep her Paris lodgings, retired to the only remaining family property in Alençon. Villedieu also still waited for her promised royal pension dedicating

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<sup>213</sup> "Guillaume Desjardins déjà souffert meurt à Clinchemore ; enfin le procès hollandais, où il semble que 'tout le bien' de Marie-Catherine ait été en jeu, connaît une issue totalement ruineuse" (Cuénin 51).

numerous works to Louis XIV. Like her character, Villedieu must have known how it felt to throw oneself on the mercy of others, despite the consequences. The weighty consequences of her public writing may explain why Sylvie's value is linked to her beauty, not her writing.

Sylvie is of unknown parentage and bereft of fortune, yet her beauty incites the Marquis de Birague's desire for her. He sees her as something other than his mistress's daughter, an accessible object, and decides he must have her. Conversely, Anaxandre's initial attraction for Iris derived from her verses, sight unseen, for Iris's beauty centered itself in the poetry that drives the narrative. As the *Mémoires* continue, we encounter women's writings in the form of a letter and an elegy, but the role of women's writing in the *Mémoires* contrasts sharply with its powerful presence in *Anaxandre*.

As we have seen, in the *Mémoires*, Sylvie's beauty/value locates itself primarily in the physical body, not the intellect. During the course of the *Mémoires*, Sylvie's use of women's writing acknowledges its mediocre status. Verses may have served as currency in the idealized world of Villedieu's *Anaxandre*, buying affection and loyalty, but in the world of the *Mémoires*, writing is of little import, and the means of exchange is one of the female body, particularly Sylvie's body. Wise observes:

But even in her independent adult life, Sylvie continues to treat herself as capital, investing (in) herself and substituting for other people in order to increase her value in social and monetary terms. Sylvie dons numerous disguises at will, first appearing as the niece of an abbess, and later passing successively as a monk in a monastery, her friend's brother, and the German prince of Salmes. (Wise 139)

In such an economy, the fate of women's writing is grim.

When women's writing appears in the narrative, it reinforces the idea of writing as devalued currency. References to women's writing permeates the narrative in the form of letters and oblique references to unnamed novels, but only two of these works are cited, a purloined

love letter written by Sylvie and an elegy written by Madame de la Suze. Finding love letters in this work is not surprising, considering Villedieu's preoccupation with the subject after the publication of her private letters in the *Lettres et Billets Galants*. However, elegies are not found in many of Villedieu's prose works, and when they appear, they usually have a function in the narrative, like Iris's elegy to Clidamis.<sup>214</sup> By comparing how women's texts are presented in the *Mémoires* and *Anaxandre*, I will show that Villedieu further dissociates the woman and writing, by devaluing women's texts.

Although letters are mentioned throughout the text as part of Sylvie's narration, the complete text of only one letter is presented to the reader.<sup>215</sup> The missive is one of Sylvie's love letters to the Comte d'Englesac:

Voici une copie de la lettre dont je parle.

Que vous êtes cruel, avec vos reproches et vos soupçons ! n'avez-vous point d'autre moyen pour vous faire dire que je vous aime, qu'en m'accusant de ne vous aimer pas ? Hélas ! regardez mes yeux, tout le monde y voit ma passion ; êtes-vous le seul homme qui l'y saurait découvrir ? Cela serait bien terrible ; car il n'y en a pour personne du monde que pour vous. Non mon cher comte, il n'y a que votre vue qui donne ces transports de joie, dont je ne suis pas la maîtresse ; il n'y a que votre absence qui ait le pouvoir de me rendre chagrine ; vous êtes l'unique charme de mon cœur, toutes mes actions vous en assurent. Je tâche à les démentir avec les gens indifférents, et ils ne laissent pas de les croire ; je les avoue de tout avec vous, et vous doutez encore que vous soyez ardemment aimé de votre Sylvie. (*Mémoires* 192-193)

The letter is written from a reproachful Sylvie to her jealous lover the Comte d'Englesac. Even if she tries to be aloof, her eyes give her away, and his presence is everything, while his absence is a terrible calamity. Although the letter is a response to a jealous lover, it testifies to

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<sup>214</sup> Villedieu's prose works frequently contain poetry. A large part of the *nouvelle*, *Anaxandre*, is Iris's poetry—including her elegy. Villedieu's prose works that include elegies are *Carmante* (1668), *Cléonice* (1669), and the *Annales Galantes* (1670).

<sup>215</sup> That is not to say that no other letters are quoted, but this is the only letter by a woman that is included in the text. An excerpt of a letter written from the Comte d'Englesac to Sylvie appears on page 153 of the René Demoris edition: “ ‘Rendez heureux la personne du monde que j'aime le mieux,’ disait-il dans cette lettre en parlant de moi, ‘et souffrez que je contribue à ce bonheur par mon consentement, puisque je ne puis y contribuer d'autre sorte. je vous demande cette complaisance comme une dernière preuve de votre amour.’ ”

reciprocated love, love that is felt as ardently by one as the other. As will become clear, this letter is a copy of the original and falls into Sylvie's hands after her separation from the Comte d'Englesac and his subsequent death.<sup>216</sup> Viewed thus, it is twice removed from its author—once by Englesac's death, and second, by its status as a mere copy of the original letter.

The letter itself is presented in Part Five of Sylvie's memoirs. Part Five is unique for two reasons. First, it is the only part with a complete letter cited, and second, it is the only part that has an "interior" narrative that is set off by its own title and narrated in the first person by someone other than Sylvie. This interior tale merits a brief mention because it allows Sylvie's love letter to enter the story. The "Histoire du Comte de Tavanès" is narrated by the title character (*Mémoires* 187).<sup>217</sup> Sylvie digresses dozens of times with side stories like this one that involve her adventures. However, the story that gives her a reason to present one of her letters is distinguished from other digressions by special formatting. The title is in bold print and clearly separates the story from Sylvie's narrative. Furthermore, Sylvie lends the "je" of the first person narration to a male character, the Comte de Tavanès. Like Sylvie, Tavanès tells his own story.

This tale of love and betrayal carries as its major theme the male narrator's hatred of women, mirroring Sylvie's own sentiments about men.<sup>218</sup> Sylvie comments, ". . . je demeurai si convaincue de sa haine pour nous, qu'insensiblement je ne le fuyais plus comme je fuyais les autres hommes. Car, Madame, ce n'était point leur personne que je haïssais, c'était leur manie de s'attacher auprès de moi, et de m'attirer toujours quelque fâcheuse aventure" (*Mémoires* 186).

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<sup>216</sup> The text does not indicate who copied the letter or from whom Sylvie received the copy.

<sup>217</sup> Sylvie includes the Count de Tavanès's story, like Anaxandre told the story of Clidamis and Iris.

<sup>218</sup> The Comte's tale includes the exposure of a treacherous lady's love letters by his rival, the Marquis de Castelnau. This Marquis and the lady in question decided to trick Tavanès into believing that they hated each other, when the opposite was really true. The lady's letters in Tavanès's story are used to clear the Marquis's conscience and reveal the lady's deceit. The secrets revealed in her letters are supposedly the cause for Tavanès's hatred of women. Since Tavanès's hatred is later revealed to be a part of a failed ruse to seduce Sylvie, this lady's letters are no more vital to the narrative than Sylvie's love letter to Englesac.

She does not want admirers because they only bring more trouble to her reputation. Due to the Comte de Tavanès's apparent hatred of women, Sylvie feels herself to be safe with him.

However, she ultimately finds that Tavanès's disdain for women is merely a ploy to seduce her.

After this digression ends, Sylvie takes up the narrative "je" once more. As her story continues, another man, the Chevalier de la Mothe tries to win Sylvie's affection. Tavanès as her "trusted" confidant tries to discourage the Chevalier's affection. He does not succeed. The Chevalier spies Tavanès in a garden, and sees letters drop from his pocket. Sylvie explains, "Ah ! Madame, quels papiers ! C'étaient huit ou dix lettres que j'avais écrites dans mes amours, au comte d'Englesac. Elles étaient sans suscription, car d'ordinaire je mets toujours une double enveloppe ; et quand on aime fort son amant, et qu'on n'est pas aussi sage que Votre Altesse, on lui écrit volontiers un peu follement" (*Mémoires* 192). Upon reading the letters, the Chevalier publicly declares Tavanès his rival, and Sylvie separates herself from Tavanès (though she still believes that Tavanès is not, in fact, pursuing her) in order to avoid more slander of her reputation. Eventually, it is revealed that the letters were actually written from Sylvie to Englesac, not Tavanès, thus extinguishing the supposed rivalry for Sylvie's affections. The matter seems to conclude, save for one problem. If Englesac is dead, how did Sylvie's letters end up in Tavanès's possession in the first place?

As mentioned earlier, a copy of one of these troublesome letters actually makes its way back to Sylvie, and she presents it in her *Mémoires*: ". . . Votre Altesse ne sera peut-être point fâchée de voir comme on écrit quand on aime beaucoup, et que cet amour n'ayant qu'un but légitime, ne contraint point les désirs du cœur" (*Mémoires* 192). Sylvie presents it as a sincere love letter and reveals that the missive has been circulated through all the salons in Lyon. Sylvie's first idea is that Englesac has come back from the dead and lost/circulated the letters,



yet the truth of the matter is soon revealed. A friend of Tavanès (who does not know Sylvie in her disguise) tells her that the count is spreading rumors that Sylvie was his lover in Lyon. Sylvie learns that Tavanès's hatred of women, and possibly his story, were a ruse to gain access to Sylvie's trust. He acquired Sylvie's letters from one of her lover's former valets, then (purposefully?) lost the letters to excite his rival's jealousy and validate his own claims on Sylvie's affections. Sylvie's letter only succeeds in inspiring jealousy, the very emotion that the letter writes against and extinguishes any hope of a romance between Tavanès and Sylvie.

Sylvie's love letter is far removed from its original context. Sylvie did not write this letter to inspire Tavanès's passion, and she certainly did not write it to make the Chevalier jealous. Once circulating publicly, Sylvie has no control over the meanings ascribed to her writing. Sylvie bears the consequences, as the public's misconstrues her original intentions. Perhaps this is why the letter returns to her in a copied form. The copy carries with it a new public meaning that eclipses the intimate message carried with the original. For a moment, in thinking that Englesac is alive, Sylvie imagines the letter in its original state, yet she realizes that this letter returns to her as something foreign that has been appropriated by the public. Thoughts of the letter and her lost love are quickly dismissed by other cares, as she returns to the reality at hand—lawsuits that threaten her (financial) independence. This letter's love is lost in the public sphere, unlike Iris's elegy that inspires Anaxandre's affection.

Both Sylvie's and Iris's intimate writings to their lovers circulate publicly with very different results. The meaning and power of their writing changes as it moves from the private sphere to the public one. Iris's cited writings are praised, and as Anaxandre states, cause him to deceive in the name of love.<sup>219</sup> Iris's musings are written to describe and inspire love, and they

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<sup>219</sup> See page 162.

do. In addition to inspiring her lover's passion, her *Vers* inspire his rival's passion and are the starting point of the adventures related in Anaxandre's narrative, "Histoire d'Iris et de Clidamis." The object of her affection, Clidamis, still lives, and the two are reunited in the end.

Sylvie's letter is meant to reassure her lover of her loyalty and to let him know that she is lost without him and happy when he is by her side. In Part Five, this letter's intended purpose is not fulfilled. Instead of promoting loyalty, Sylvie's writing is used by one rival to incite the jealousy of another, yet neither man is Sylvie's lover. Additionally, the letter blights Sylvie's reputation as it circulates in the salons. Finally, her letter does not initiate or directly relate to the interior narrative of the *Mémoires*'s fifth part, "Histoire du Comte de Tavanès." The letter does not appear in the text until *after* Tavanès has decided to pursue Sylvie through a ruse. Sylvie's value is once again located in her physical beauty. Tavanès does not pursue her due to her writing. His desire and deceit is sparked by the sight of her, ". . . le comte de Tavanès m'avait vue à Grenoble, et qu'il y était devenu amoureux de moi" (*Mémoires* 195).

Women's private writing, circulated in the public sphere, undergoes very different fates in these two instances. In *Anaxandre*, Iris's love poetry is the beginning of Anaxandre's treacherous attempt to steal Iris from Clidamis. Her poetry/letter is very important to the progression of the narrative. In the *Mémoires*, Sylvie's letter is an afterthought, a distant reminder of the past whose original intention, time and circumstance rewrites entirely.

In the *Mémoires*, women's writing is never private, as Sylvie presents one of her own purloined letters circulated in the public. Sylvie also contributes to this cycle of circulating women's writings, and even endorses false writings about women. Sylvie has just narrowly escaped the clutches of another of her admirers, in drag once again, when she finds refuge with Madame de Roste. During her stay, she carelessly peruses some letters written to her hostess to

pass the time. Sylvie stumbles on an account of her own story written by Marigny,<sup>220</sup> another gossip like Tallemant des Réaux. Sylvie writes,

J'ai toujours aimé la façon d'écrire de cet homme ; et je témoignai à la baronne tant de curiosité pour voir les lettres, qu'elle fut assez obligeante pour nous en montrer quelques-unes. Je me trouvai dans deux ou trois, parce qu'elles étaient presque toutes des espèces de gazettes de ce qui se passait de considérable à Paris et à la Cour de France, et il m'avait honorée d'une place dans ses relations. Elles n'étaient ni trop vraies, ni trop charitables ; mais je les trouvais partout si pleines d'esprit, que je crus que tout était permis à un homme comme celui-là, et qu'il fallait pardonner à sa malice en faveur de ses expressions. (*Mémoires* 251)

In a work written entirely for the purpose of correcting misconceptions about her life, Sylvie complacently praises the erroneous rewriting of her life by Marigny. Truth is secondary to poetic expression, and this lovely fiction even seduces Sylvie into honoring a false account of her life. Her complacency nearly negates her earlier claim, "J'avais la vertu, et j'en eus toujours, quoi qu'ait osé publier au contraire la médisance d'un siècle corrompu, et la rage de mes ennemis" (*Mémoires* 80). Through this gesture, Sylvie emphasizes, once again, that the time in which she lives will never value truth over the beauty of a gallant tale. Appearance overrides reality, even in her own case, as she reads Marigny's letter while disguised as a young man.

Sylvie goes one step further and continues (thus endorses) the circulation of another woman's private writing in the public sphere. Sylvie includes an elegy in the *Mémoires*, despite her own comments decrying the public circulation of her love letter: "J'en devenais plus innocente ; mais je n'en étais pas moins embarrassée" (*Mémoires* 192). Sylvie finds the elegy, supposedly written by Madame de la Suze, in one of Madame de Roste's letters.<sup>221</sup> The narrative itself gives us no other description or information about Madame de la Suze except that she is dying and that most people consider her already dead, ". . . la pauvre comtesse de la Suze était

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<sup>220</sup> "Marigny was a satiric poet and songwriter during the Fronde" (Kuizenga 172, n. 15).

<sup>221</sup> See page 144.

malade d'une maladie dont elle ne pouvait guérir, et qu'on la regardait comme morte"

(*Mémoires* 251).<sup>222</sup> In the *Mémoires*, this dying poet writes of dying love. The sorrowful theme does not excite the reader's passions. The elegy begins:

Il est enfin parti, cet homme incomparable,  
Ce Tirsis, que mes yeux trouvaient si redoutable ;<sup>223</sup>  
Je ne le verrai plus annoncer à mon cœur,  
Les funestes périls d'une nouvelle ardeur ;  
Je ne les verrai plus, ces tyranniques charmes,  
Livrer à ma fierté tant de rudes alarmes.  
Agissez, ma raison, par cent efforts puissants,  
Soutenez mes desseins et détrompez mes sens. (*Mémoires* 251)

Pride and reason override passion, and the elegy reverses the images from Sylvie's love letter to Englesac. In the elegy, the sight of the lover brings pain, while later in the poem, absence brings a happy, tranquil moment: "Le moment de l'absence est un moment heureux, / Pour qui veut surmonter un penchant dangereux" (*Mémoires* 252). Instead of reassuring the lover of devotion and faith, as in the first lines of Sylvie's letter, the elegy dismisses the unfaithful lover with indifference, allowing reason and pride to shut the door on a passion that has made such a fool of the woman writing:

Mais il se flatte en vain, d'une fausse espérance,  
Rien ne peut surmonter la froide indifférence  
Que cet ingrat oppose à ses tendres désirs,  
.....  
Sortez, fatal Tirsis, sortez de ma pensée ;  
je sens que ma fierté me ramène mon cœur,  
Et ce dernier transport est ma dernière erreur. (*Mémoires* 251-252)

Although the elegy's author is identified, the intended recipient of this poem remains anonymous in the narrative space, subsumed under the commonly-used epithet, Tirsis. The poem is unable

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<sup>222</sup> "The origin of the poem is unclear. It does not appear among the works of Madame de la Suze, and it is unlikely that Villedieu, a poet herself, would have published one of her own works under the name of another" (Kuizenga 173, n. 16).

<sup>223</sup> "Tirsis" was commonly used as a pseudonym in the seventeenth century. Villedieu uses this name in several of her works to refer to her lover, Antoine, including "Jouissance" and *Anaxandre* (In Iris's poetry, Iris refers to her lover, Clidamis, as Tirsis—both Clidamis and Tirsis were pseudonyms that Villedieu used to refer to Antoine).

to hold the reader's or Sylvie's interest for long, for there is no intrigue surrounding the elegy if the lover in question is not identified. Suze's story of love and betrayal could be anyone's.<sup>224</sup> This woman's writing does not inspire anything, for the story is an old one: love and betrayal. Sylvie, and Villedieu for that matter, know this story all too well.

Therefore, it is not surprising that an *elegy* that appears in the closing pages of the *Mémoires* has little importance to the dynamic of the narrative. Sylvie even asks the *Altesse's* forgiveness for *interrupting* the story: "je vais vous l'envoyer ; car je trouve cette pièce admirable, et je pense que vous me pardonnerez volontiers d'interrompre mon histoire, . . ." (*Mémoires* 251). The elegy, unlike the episode with Sylvie's letters, is a disruption which appears to have nothing to do with the narrative. The elegy is dismissed, as quickly as it is presented. Sylvie's narrative sharply resumes, for one of her many pursuers arrives at Madame de Roste's.

So, is the reader to dismiss this elegy, like the characters themselves? In the pages of the *Mémoires*, it seems to have little purpose and a rather common subject. When compared with the elegy in *Anaxandre*, Suze's elegy works to devalue the status of women's writing and the woman as writer like the *Mémoires'* dedicatory letter, literary portrait of Sylvie, and love letter. Earlier, I demonstrated that the "Elegie en forme de songe" from *Anaxandre* served as the starting point for the entire narrative.<sup>225</sup> Written by the protagonist, Iris, in a moment of longing, it seduced the *Dames de Bruxelles* and the *Belles Insulaires/Insensibles*, into asking about the

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<sup>224</sup> The common epithet, Tirsis, is used. The betrayed lover in this elegy could be Villedieu, Sylvie, Iris—any jilted woman. This traditional language and form further disconnects the elegy from our unique and lively heroine, who at the moment is cross-dressing to avoid capture. It is hard for the reader to imagine Sylvie composing, or even appreciating, an elegy such as this. She is an adventuress, and even at the end of the work, her thirst for adventure is not quenched despite her decision to stay in the convent.

<sup>225</sup> See page 158.

author. Additionally, the elegy gave Anaxandre the means to enter their confidence.<sup>226</sup> The poem is intimately connected to the protagonist's story. The elegy is meaningful because so much is known about the circumstances of its composition. Without this elegy, Anaxandre would not have been admitted to *Belles Illustres'* circle, and his story would never have started.

Conversely, the elegy in the *Mémoires*, starts nothing and is dismissed quickly. In fact, rather than having a nascent narrative function, its themes and origins seem to indicate a dead end. The tone of the elegy is sorrowful and is the end of love. In contrast, Iris's elegy is full of passion. In the sad elegy, Suze praises the absence of the lover, rather than lamenting it as Iris does. His absence affords Suze a respite from the violence of her passion. The fidelity of Iris's elegy is replaced with suspicion in Suze's. Reason and pride override passion for Suze, and *froidueur* replaces the flame ever-present in Iris's writing. Once again, in the *Mémoires*, women's writing is devalued, but for different reasons than Sylvie's letter. In Suze's elegy, controlled writing fails to incite the same interest as Sylvie's widely circulated love letter, yet, ultimately, the elegy suffers the same fate in the narrative—it is dismissed.<sup>227</sup>

### Villedieu's Choice

Why would a writer who has dedicated her life to her literary works, devalue women's status as writer and woman's texts in a work that contains autobiographical material? It is tempting to say that this is the obvious path for an embattled writer to take and to conclude that *Anaxandre* offers the idealism of a successful author in the prime of her career, and the

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<sup>226</sup> Villedieu does not specify how Iris's elegy arrived on the *Dames Insulaires'* table on the *Isle des Vertus*.

Anaxandre probably managed to sneak it into their possession, but the narrative does not offer a definite answer.

<sup>227</sup> In fact, we know the elegy attributed to Madame de Suze has not been widely circulated for it does not appear in any of her published works, and Sylvie writes, “. . . je ne crois pas que vous ayez vue ; car il lui mandait qu'elle ne l'avait été de personne” (*Mémoires* 251).

*Mémoires* manifest the disappointment and hardship of an experienced realist.<sup>228</sup> Between the writing of *Anaxandre* and the *Mémoires*, Villedieu experienced her fair share of hardship.

Antoine had married another and then died at the siege of Lille. That same year, her private love letters were made public against her wishes in the form of the *Lettres et billets galants*. After losing her case in Holland, Villedieu fell on grave financial difficulties and nearly wrote herself to death trying to make ends meet.<sup>229</sup> She wrote the *Mémoires* during this trying time and finished them in her stay at the convent, from 1672 to 1675. Accepted into high society, her writing afforded social mobility into aristocratic circles, but at what cost?<sup>230</sup> Through her writing talent, she had broken into a world that rigorously excluded outsiders and eager “social climbers,” yet never really became a part of that world.<sup>231</sup> Just as Sylvie used her body to maintain a tenuous hold on her social standing, Villedieu used her writing in the same manner. The exhausting years that followed her dire financial problems (after she lost her court case) would reinforce this idea of participating in, but never belonging to, the society which she frequented.

Indeed, Villedieu’s life events and “autobiographical” writings seem to support the assumption that after years as a writer, she was disenchanted with her chosen profession, but is this really the case? In *Anaxandre*, the use of women’s writing as a means of exchange erodes

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<sup>228</sup> Although the works are only approximately five to seven years apart, after *Anaxandre* was published, Villedieu fell into grave financial difficulty, and wrote prolifically, producing an incredible number of works including *Carmente*, *Recueil de quelques lettres et relations galantes*, *Le journal amoureux* (6 volumes), *Nouveau recueil de quelques pièces galantes*, *Cléonice*, *Les amours des grands hommes*, and *Les exilés de la cour*.

<sup>229</sup> “On s’explique qu’une lassitude profonde, pour ne pas dire une véritable nausée se soit abattue sur la malheureuse, contrainte, pour vivre décemment, et presque sûrement pour payer ses dettes, aux ‘travaux forcés de la littérature’ : environ mille cents pages par l’an !” (Cuénin 133).

<sup>230</sup> Cuénin remarks, “On voit que Mlle Desjardins était accueillie dans les cercles aristocratiques, et que ses fréquentations, où qu’elle allât, ne s’établissaient qu’au niveau le plus élevé” (98).

<sup>231</sup> It only makes sense that Villedieu would present a character with no verifiable birth or financial resources whose fate was in the hands of those who decided to look on her with favor. Beauty is how Sylvie climbs in social status through the institution of marriage. In the *Mémoires*, Villedieu writes a world where literature is of little import, and the physical is the real means of exchange.

its affirmation of woman as writing subject. If a woman's writings are successful, they eclipse the author's identity. Villedieu's *Mémoires* emphasize that women's writing is devalued as soon as it hits the public sphere. For Villedieu, in the *Mémoires*, writing, fictionalized or not, only serves to bring more infamy to a woman's reputation. However, the interpretive possibilities do not end here, for *Anaxandre* is narrated by a masculine voice, whereas the *Mémoires* are narrated by a feminine voice.<sup>232</sup> This simple difference in voice offers a more meaningful commentary on the evolution of Villedieu's presentation of the woman writer and her writings.

In *Anaxandre*, women's writing is valued in the form of Iris's elegy and poetry, yet Iris, the woman writer, is not there. It is Anaxandre who recounts her story with his version of events.<sup>233</sup> Anaxandre's narration is second-hand information told by a lover scorned, and his account of Iris is questionable. Iris's writing speaks for itself. In society/public space, a woman *is* what she writes. Texts are the woman writer's worth in *Anaxandre*. The marked presence of Iris's writing in the text distinguishes her from other seventeenth-century heroines. Writing holds such a privileged place that it actually eclipses the woman author. It represents her, but the writer herself only appears in the text through Anaxandre's narration. The interpretation of woman's texts is left to a masculine narrator, who relates his tale in a fashion worthy of Marigny cited by Sylvie.<sup>234</sup> In this context, writing takes the place of the woman who wrote it in the first place.

In the *Mémoires*, it is evident from the narrative's start that women's writing is devalued in light of another form of social currency, beauty. However, Sylvie has worth and is present in

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<sup>232</sup> Although it is true that Villedieu narrates the dedicatory letter and closing comments in *Anaxandre*, and Tavanès narrates his own brief story in the *Mémoires*, the Tavanès episode is brief, and Anaxandre is the agent that Villedieu uses to convince the Dames de Bruxelles that she is worthy of their praise.

<sup>233</sup> Cuénin comments, "Suivant la tradition, le récit est prêté à un ami du héros principal, Clidamis" (248).

<sup>234</sup> See page 185.



the text to tell her tale in the first person. She controls her own literary fate through self-representation. She is also portrayed as understanding the economy that exploits her well enough to exploit it right back. Her social value is centered in her beauty and her wit, not her writing.<sup>235</sup>

By breaking apart the unity of physical beauty (appearances) and lauded writing represented by Iris, Villedieu withdraws writing as a social commodity from the space of her narrative. In this tangible narrative space, writing is worthless in the public sphere. No literary market exists in the *Mémoires*, in contrast to the ideal, dream-like, world of *Anaxandre*. Writing, when removed from the public realm, is no longer significant to public identity. This creates a new space where writing is more than fuel for slander. In the *Mémoires*, the false and circulating women's writings are not valued. Instead, Sylvie's own writing is privileged—a candid presentation of her story interpreted by her own words. Through Sylvie, Villedieu takes the first step toward the ideal place she described in *Anaxandre*.

After much experience, Villedieu devalues private writing in the public sphere because that is precisely what she is writing against, reading private life into public works. Sylvie writes her *Mémoires* after the fact in a temporal vacuum that transcends public space and time. In a similar move, Sylvie retires to a convent, withdrawing her beauty from the social economy.

Mais, Madame, si je continue dans l'humeur où je suis, je n'en prendrai jamais d'autre que celle où je suis. je la trouve douce, le couvent ne me paraît plus ce qu'il m'avait paru dans une vue éloignée, et je pourrais dire qu'il ne manquerait rien au repos de mon esprit, si je pouvais vous dire de près, comme je vous l'écris ici, que personne du monde n'est dévoué à Votre Altesse avec tant de zèle et tant de soumission, que sa très humble et très obéissante servante. (*Mémoires* 263)

Sylvie affirms her subjectivity by withdrawing herself from the social economy. She is more than just beauty. Villedieu, through Sylvie, emphasizes that she is more than just the public

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<sup>235</sup> Sylvie's beauty could be a sort of wish-fulfillment for Villedieu.

perception of her writings. I believe that the *Mémoires*' obscure autobiographical links and anonymous publication were simply Villedieu's way of reclaiming her public identity.<sup>236</sup> Cuénin comments:

. . . mais d'autre part, en raison des similitudes troublantes des deux ensembles, il paraît évident que le premier destinataire du récit n'est pas la duchesse, mais Marie-Catherine elle-même. Par la plume, par son talent d'écrivain, par la construction de son personnage, ni tout à fait elle-même ni tout à fait un autre, elle édifie sa revanche contre le sort injuste. Cette oeuvre d'imagination vise donc un double but : réhabiliter son auteur à ses propres yeux, et divertir une grande dame ; le moyen est double également : assez de vérité pour que la narratrice et sa complice repèrent au passage tout ce qu'elles connaissent – les signes de connivence sont innombrables – assez de mensonge aussi pour satisfaire à la prudence, à la fantaisie et au rêve. (Cuénin 256)

It makes sense that Villedieu would write a more savvy and less artistic woman after the ideal image of Iris was likely shattered by the publication of her own private love letters, but it is troubling how devalued actual writing is in the *Mémoires*. If Sylvie was Villedieu's last vision of the woman writer, then one could certainly conclude that her disenchantment with the public sphere led her to write a woman writer who ultimately rejects her role and retires. However, Villedieu had one more chance to imagine the woman writer, and in the *Désordres de l'amour*, I believe she finally reconciled the woman and her writings. I propose that instead of only two parts of Villedieu's career, pre-*Lettres et billets galants* (1667) and post, there are in fact three. The third part begins with the disenchantment of the *Mémoires*.

After the anonymous publication, ambiguous dedicatory letter, and vague autobiographical references of Sylvie's *Mémoires*, Villedieu's last work is signed and the author is very present in her text, both in the preface and in "maxims" placed throughout the narrative. Villedieu's insistence/emergence as a separate entity from her writing in the *Mémoires* leads her to rewrite the story of her letters, with undeniable purpose, back into her last text. As a subject,

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<sup>236</sup> See Démoris 19.

she reclaims her work as her own. In her last work, *Les désordres de l'amour*, Villedieu finds the key to balancing the woman and the writer. The protagonist, the Princesse de Guise, manages to balance the traits of Iris, the *writing* woman, and Sylvie, the *woman* writer. Ultimately, Villedieu identifies herself with Guise and enjoys the same autonomy as her character.

### ***Les désordres de l'amour***

*Les désordres de l'amour* presents three stories, the last of which has two parts. The final story recounts the loves of Givry, one of Henry III's most trusted military officers. For the current study, the women he loves, Madame de Maugiron and the Princesse de Guise, are of more interest. One of his loves, Madame de Maugiron dies of love for him, while Givry seeks his own death after Guise rejects him.

Both Maugiron and Guise are writers in this work. Maugiron's love letters to Givry are taken by the enemy, and Maugiron's letters eventually arrive in Guise's hands. Guise then writes her own comments, in the form of maxims, on Maugiron's letters. The letters are returned to Givry, and he instantly falls in love with the maxims' author. Miller comments, ". . . he succumbs to the powers of idealization, to the perfect because imaginary woman. Against that model, Mme de Maugiron's bodily claims necessarily pale" ("Tender Economies" 85). In this instance, Guise and Iris are the same, both idealized in the eyes of their distant masculine reader. In addition, Guise's writings drive the narrative, in much the same way as Iris's did in *Anaxandre*. However, Guise is not eclipsed by her writing like Iris.

The results of idealization are completely different in *Désordres de l'amour*, as Guise, like Sylvie, is "in the know" and maintains control. Instead of favorably receiving Givry's attentions, the princess has the power to reject him. She is ultimately untouched by her writings.

This “separate but equal” status of woman and writings is the culmination of Villedieu’s examinations of the woman writer. Villedieu moves from Iris, the woman eclipsed by her writings, to Sylvie, the woman who eclipses her own writing. Finally, in Guise, Villedieu accomplishes what she could not in Iris and Sylvie. Guise is the perfect woman writer who controls her own fate, while she remains independent from her writing, despite its weighty consequences even in the political sphere. Beasley observes:

Through Mlle de Guise and her textual maxims, Villedieu valorizes the female writer and endows her textual production with political power. She specifies that this power lies not in the traditional writing of a Madame de Maugiron but in the act of commentary, be it on the text of another writer or on history’s narrative. In this final story, Villedieu highlights the written text as a subversive political tool capable of affecting public history. . . . (Beasley 188)

For Beasley, Guise not only operates in the realm of “love letters,” but through her commentary, effects political change. Her “maxims” heighten tensions between the powerful Guise family and King Henry III who was angered by Givry’s death. Therefore, her writing not only drives Villedieu’s narrative, but it also changes history. So, how does this author of powerful writings who maintains her subjectivity reflect Villedieu’s experience as a writer?

Faith Beasley argues that the maxims in the narrative actually unite the author and her character: “Villedieu strengthens the tie between herself as author of the *Désordres* and the disordering Mlle de Guise by identifying the princess’s commentaries as maxims. These four maxims resemble those of the narrator [Villedieu] in the previous two stories, both in content and form” (Beasley 188).<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, Nancy Miller claims, “. . . the author in fact *doubles* herself in the narrative: figuring both as the phallic woman—the narcissistic princess whose poetry has repercussions in affairs of state—and the classic woman in love—Mme de Maugiron, the ambiguous woman with a past whose prose ultimately leaves her on the margins of history”

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<sup>237</sup> Beasley refers to the “disordering Mlle de Guise,” for her writing acts to disrupt the public sphere.

(“Tender Economies” 83-84). Miller’s interpretation complicates Guise’s presence, for she also identifies Mme de Maugiron, “the classic woman in love,” with Villedieu. So how do Guise and Villedieu break their ties with Maugiron? Guise wrote *on* Maugiron’s letters, while Villedieu, in her purloined love letters, published as the *Lettres et Billets Galants*, was “the classic woman in love.”

Katharine Jensen offers an answer to this dilemma, by reading Villedieu’s stolen missives as something more than masochistic love letters. By placing Guise’s writing into what Jensen terms a “meta-epistolary” space, Villedieu replays the freedom she obtained from the masochistic writing of the *Lettres et Billets Galants*. Jensen explains:

The more Desjardins produced the language of her desire, . . . the more she was obliged to turn her invalidated desire against herself, which reinforced her tropes of female masochism. Her strategy, then, to avoid the pain of such self-dispossession was to write neither in Villedieu’s language nor in her own but to write about writing, to move into a meta-epistolary register. . . . It is precisely from this meta-epistolary position that the princess wields power in private and public domains, remaining untouched by the disorders she provokes. (Jensen, *Writing Love* 70)

Jensen argues that Villedieu’s presentation of Guise reproduces her efforts in the *Lettres* to counter self-dispossession in her relationship with Antoine, as a woman unrequited in love. I would like to add to this, that Villedieu’s presentation of Guise also represents Villedieu’s desire to create a fictional character in a world in which a woman writer could exist in tandem with her writings without those writings eclipsing her own subjectivity or destroying/affecting her reputation. By killing off Maugiron—the vestiges of the author’s failed attempts to reconcile the fictional woman writer and her works through stories of women in love like herself—Villedieu obliterates the self-dispossession and public fallout of the *Lettres* and replaces it with a woman writer who endures and whose writings are the powerful instigators of events that change history without affecting her own fate.

However, Villedieu frames this written defense mechanism in a narrative space in which the writer, Guise, is not troubled by unrequited love. Jensen comments, “Unlike Maugiron’s and Villedieu’s amorous language, the maxims that exert so much force in the novel do not implicate the princess in emotional dependence on a man. . . . To this extent, she remains self-possessed” (*Writing Love* 70). Thus, through her writing and actions, Guise provides Villedieu’s last vision of the woman writer. Villedieu no longer imagined herself as defined by her writing, like Iris, nor did she indicate that her life defined her writings, like Sylvie. At the end of her career, she was simply the woman writer—the woman who coexists with her writing in harmony. She rewrites her own story. No longer is her story of stolen letters the stuff of powerless, under-classed women writers subject to the whims of disloyal lovers and wily publishers. Villedieu’s narrative ascends to the political realm, where a simple love letter can change the fate of a nation.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion: Ambitious Women, Exceptional Circumstances, and Choice**

Well-behaved women seldom make history.  
—Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

I have always appreciated this quote popular with feminists, for it at once addresses the woman who is the “exception to the rule of gender,”—the “unruly” woman—even as it praises her for extraordinary achievement remembered through the ages. It cries, “If you are ambitious, then misbehave!” Why do women necessarily have to misbehave to be ambitious? Why do women have to be “notorious” to really make history? When I think of *ancien régime* women in the context of this quote, the authors in this study are eclipsed by the “Amazonian” types—like Eleanor d’Aquitaine who led her husband’s troops to battle and Mademoiselle de Montpensier who took control during the *Fronde* when her father was supposedly cowering in his room. Despite their “bad” behavior, figures like these have never really satisfied me. They made history as exceptional women, but only because their behavior was perceived as entirely masculine. They were warrior women conquering men, and like Thamaris, absolute exceptions to the rule of the well-behaved woman.

I would argue that the real interest lies with how women transcended behavioral dictates without the need to completely dissociate from their own identities in order to adopt “masculine” roles. The women I have studied all endeavored, to some degree, to frame their writing in the bounds of socially acceptable behavior. Pizan and Albret resorted to their roles as mothers, while Villedieu established herself as a “married” woman by signing many of her texts with the pseudonym, Madame de Villedieu. In their writings, the pillars of their authority ultimately rested on their strategic use of the dominant myths of woman. These were “notorious” women who veiled themselves through public writing in a world of decorum and modified social

structures to fit their own needs. All this to say that I was never satisfied with how society defined a woman as “exceptional,” according to *its* rule and *its* dictates. I wanted to find out how a woman defined *herself* and how she redefined *society* to fit her needs.

I posit that many modern critics are so focused on the *reception* of women who broke the mold that they leave the woman’s perceptions out of the “exceptional” equation. Like Mary Sheriff, I believe the personal experience of the ambitious woman has much more to tell us than sweeping theoretical generalizations about exceptions in French society across the ages. For this reason, my work is not a reception study; rather, this analysis privileges the specificity of personal experience. Looking back on the three writers that I chose, I ask myself if they really wanted to be exceptions. Would Pizan have been happier if her husband had lived, and would Albret and Villedieu eventually have reconciled with their estranged Antoinettes? If extraordinary circumstances had not changed their lives, Pizan might have never written a word; Albret might have returned to the Catholic religion; and Villedieu might have continued to write idealized women writers like Iris into her texts. Hardship and heartache changed their lives, but these obstacles did not *cause* them to write about their experience—all three made a choice. Often, by referring to them as exceptional, we ignore how difficult this choice must have been and simply focus on their difference from other women. We assume that they had inexhaustible courage to go with their incredible actions.

As my analysis shows, these women had moments of doubt. Pizan catalogues her concerns in the *Cité des dames*; Albret hesitated to publicly avow her Protestant faith until her father’s death; and Villedieu’s *Mémoires* questioned society’s conflation of a woman writer and her writings. They are not indefatigable “feminist” amazons, nor are they strictly traditional examples of women in society. Even in their literary moments of doubt, these women managed



to define themselves in ways that shored up their own identity. Ultimately, their ambition and the choices that went along with it, allowed them to make history with one foot in the “well-behaved” sphere and the other in a space beyond social definition. I would like to revisit Nancy Miller’s description of “feminist writing” presented in the introduction in order to explain how. As cited in the first chapter, Miller endeavors to supplant anachronism with her explanation:

At a first level, then, feminist writing articulates as and in a discourse of self-consciousness about women’s identity. I mean by this both an inherited cultural fiction and a process of construction. Second, feminist writing makes a claim for the heroine’s singularity by staging the difficulty of her relations as a woman in fiction to Woman. Third it contests the available plots of female development or *Bildung* and embodies dissent from the dominant tradition in a certain number of recurrent narrative gestures. . . . Finally through an insistence on singularity, feminist writing figures the existence of other subjective economies, other styles of identity. (*Subject to Change* 8)

Each woman in this study fulfills this definition in different ways through both her life events and her writing, and each one creates a new “style of identity” for herself in her literary work.

Christine de Pizan wrote women with purpose. By this I mean she wrote about women and for them. I also mean that the literary images of women she created, including herself, served their/her own ends. Othea advised men, and Pizan centered her goddess’s authority to speak on the paternal. When she wrote about her life struggles, she balanced a socially acceptable maternal vision of herself with the unorthodox Pizan that wrote books, provided for her family, and questioned commonly held beliefs about women. In her life, as well as her writing, Pizan is Miller’s “singular heroine,” negotiating the space between her own subjectivity and the notion of Woman. In Pizan’s case, her unorthodox actions challenged Woman, and Pizan’s writing asked unsettling questions. Almost every critic of Pizan emphasizes that in her works, she never really pushed for radical social change—she was no activist. I agree. She worked within the constraints of fifteenth-century society, but her very visible presence as a female writer publishing works openly challenged the notion of Woman and offered alternative

possibilities to French women. Every work that she wrote served as a gesture toward new horizons for ambitious women like herself who had the resolve to choose the non-traditional path. In her texts, Pizan acknowledges that she is unique among women. She admits that her renown is not entirely due to the erudition of her works:

Il est voir que, comme la voix | courust ja, et meismes entre les princes, de l'ordre et mainiere de mon vivre, c'est assavoir a l'estude, quoy que celler le voulsisse, pour ce que revelé leur estoit, leur fils presens comme de nouvelles choses, quelque petis et foible qu'ilz fussent, de mes volumes de plusieurs matieres, les quelz de leur grace receurent a joie—et plus, comme je tiens, pour la chose non usagee que femme escripse, comme pieça n'avenist, que pour la dineté que y ssoit. Et ainsi furent en pou d'eure ventillez et portez mes dis livres en plusieurs pars et pays divers. (*L'Advision Christine* III.XI)

It is true that as word of my way of life (or its studiousness) had already spread and especially among the princes—for it was revealed to them even though I would have preferred it hidden—I presented them with some new things from my books on various subjects, small and feeble though they were. These they willingly saw and by their grace joyfully received like kind and gentle princes, and more I think for the novelty of a woman who could write (since that had not occurred for quite some time) than for any worth there might be in them. In this way my said books were soon discussed and carried into many different lands and regions.  
(*Christine's Vision* III.XI)

Pizan knew that she was celebrated due to her status as an exception to the rule of gender. She knew she was different. However, through her many works, she also shows us that her writing is valuable—that her words are valuable—despite her sex or class or family status. Pizan placed such importance on engaging the public sphere and advising that she made the choice to write, and in that decision, found an alternate “style of identity” for herself. She did not define herself strictly according to social dictates; rather, she located her subjectivity in the intellect and public responsibility that men and women alike can share.

Future “feminist” studies of Pizan might benefit from a shift in focus that emphasizes Pizan’s own rendition of her journey rather than her writing’s effect on other women or on society in general. Taking into account how Pizan’s writings are in dialogue with her own life

events adds a new dimension to our view of Pizan as an “exception to the rule of gender.” In her writing, we see how she grapples with this designation. Pizan challenges the notion at the same time that she uses it to her own advantage. Additionally, I have shown that Pizan’s texts for male audiences have much more to tell us about her identity than previously thought. Future work on Pizan might include studies that compare how she portrays herself in works according to genre and intended audience. Is there a decided difference in her self-portrayal in works intended for men versus women? Does Pizan use socially acceptable roles differently in these texts? Why does Pizan write about herself more in some works than others? How does she portray herself in texts that are not specifically aimed at either a masculine or feminine audience? Pizan wrote many more works than the few addressed in this study, and further scholarship will show, in even more detail, how Pizan defined herself as a female writing subject.

Jeanne d’Albret may have read Pizan’s works, but their lives, and writings for that matter, were very different. For this reason, Albret presented an exciting challenge in this study. She did not write to please her public, like Pizan and Villedieu. Consequently, especially in her later works, she had little use for style: “Cependant je prieray ceux qui liront cecy excuser le style d’une femme, qui a estimé le subject de son livre si excellent qu’il n’y a eu besoin de belles paroles pour le farder ; seulement de la vérité, laquelle elle y a si fidèlement observé . . .” (*Mémoires* 121). In her texts, Albret constantly struggles with external forces—be it her own subjects or the French kingdom. She battles with those in authority—with her mother in the marriage protest and the poetic letters and with Catholicism in her writings after her conversion to Protestantism. Albret kept her comments about women’s abilities brief, yet her presence in her writings and her actions in life speak volumes about the sixteenth-century exception to the rule of gender. In an ellipse that will forever plague me, she writes in her memoirs, “Je ne

m’amuseray à ce dédaigneux épithète d’imbécilité de femme, car si je vouloy ici entreprendre la défense de mon sexe, j’ay assez de raison et exemples. . . .” (*Mémoires* 93). I often wonder if war and her own safety were not foremost in her thoughts, how she might have filled that empty space—how she might have catalogued the merits of extraordinary women like Pizan so aptly does in the *Cité des dames*—and where she would have placed herself in that catalogue.

Where does Jeanne d’Albret belong, and did she engage in “feminist writing”? If we accept Albret as the “singular heroine” of her texts that challenges traditional modes of “female development,” then the answer to this question is a resounding “yes.” From the moment she penned her marriage protest, Albret must have understood that she was a political tool. It does not matter whether her words in the protest are a pose or are sincere. In writing such a document, she realized that her life was not her own, and choice was an illusion. In her poetry to her mother, Albret engages her status as “pawn.” She did not select her husband; rather, the King arranged her marriage with Antoine. In the letters, she makes the best of her lot and embraces newfound independence, while her mother, who opposed the match, constantly tries to reclaim authority over her daughter’s fate. In her letter to the Vicomte de Gourdon, Albret’s ambitions overcome her fear, and she defies her parents and openly avows herself a Protestant. Breaking out of the traditional role of dutiful wife, Albret eventually separated from her husband and courageously bore the consequences—political, public, and private—of the estrangement. Her husband’s death left Albret at another crossroads. She opted to maintain her autonomy and openly defy Charles IX and Catherine de Medici—at first in her own domains, and finally as a powerful leader in the Wars of Religion. Her *Mémoires* are the apogee of Albret’s quest for an independent self, and by “styling her identity” within the traditional realm of the maternal, she fulfills her own political and personal ambitions.

Fulfilling these ambitions required more than the few texts I have reviewed in this analysis. Albret wrote countless letters, poems, and political treatises/edicts that have yet to be analyzed in what I will term, a “literary” vein. For critics, most of these documents are simply used to establish her life events or clarify (or complicate) the history of the Protestant Reformation in France. Reviewing Albret’s complete works using themes like the “maternal” will reveal that this Protestant queen, often accused of lacking style in her writing, actually was a very self-conscious writer who manipulated rhetoric to serve her own ends. One future project that will greatly increase the feasibility of such an undertaking is the collection of Albret’s letters. Without the luxury of reading her complete correspondence from start to finish, no “big picture” exists for the Albret scholar wishing to describe overarching trends in her self-portrayals, maternal or otherwise. To date, her letters have never been collected in one critical volume, and few letters have been translated into English. Much of her correspondence still remains unedited. Until such a collection is available, a full exploration of her journey to writing subject and autonomous queen will remain elusive.

Unlike Albret’s, Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu’s writings are readily available and offer a very complete picture of a seventeenth-century woman’s experience as exception to the rule of gender. Villedieu wrote her life. Some critics give Tallemant des Réaux and similar gossip columnists the credit for what we know of Villedieu’s life, but her works cast doubt on these accounts. In *Anaxandre*, Villedieu sets out to right a wrong. She posits a passionate and virtuous woman writer in place of the “notorious” one society had created. She attempts to negotiate the cultural myths of women’s identity by portraying a woman writer like herself in such a positive light. This ideal fails, and events beyond her control, especially the publication of Villedieu’s private love letters, undo the woman writer’s image crafted in *Anaxandre*.

Villedieu never stops rewriting the possibilities, and the woman writer is different each time she appears in Villedieu's works. Sylvie is no idyllic, chaste heroine, and she ultimately undermines the power of her own writing by praising a gossip columnist like Tallemant des Réaux, Marigny. Nevertheless, at the end of the *Mémoires*, the woman writer is intact, and, at the very least, she has control over her own story by virtue of the first-person narration of the text. It is her choice to write her story how she wants even if it does devalue the status of women's writing in the public sphere. In her last work, Villedieu finally manifests in a female character a strategy hinted at years earlier with her *Recueil de quelques lettres et relations galantes* through writing in what Katharine Jensen terms a "meta-epistolary register." As a "literary critic" of sorts, the Princesse de Guise, the woman writer, is ultimately untouched by what she writes, yet sends a powerful message into the world. Through rewriting the woman author, Villedieu grappled with her own ambitions to publish in a society that rampantly conflated her life and works. Through Guise, Villedieu found her own "style of identity" and moved on with her life.

Future studies of Villedieu might benefit from a more detailed look at how the author uses poetry and "interior narratives" (such as the "Histoire d'Iris et Clidamis") in her prose works. Like Pizan and Albret, I have only touched the surface of Villedieu's oeuvre. Female, as well as male, writers and their writings appear in many of her works. It might be interesting to perform a comparative study of Villedieu's use of writing and interior narratives in texts narrated by male characters versus texts narrated by female characters. Additionally, one might even compare the fate of women's writing to the fate of men's writing in order to further determine Villedieu's appraisal of writing in the public sphere. Are men subject to the same social forces as women in the author's works? Do men's writings appear as frequently, and if so, in what capacity? Do these writings drive the narrative, or are they simply digressions? What do men's

writings in Villedieu's texts reveal about her own experience? Finally, does Villedieu abandon or distort convention while using poetry and interior narratives, and how does this reflect on the author's own status as writer? All these questions will be answered through in-depth analyses of Villedieu's complete works, offering a comprehensive portrait of Villedieu's portrayal of the female writing subject.

By focusing on how these *ancien régime* women writers defined their experience through their writings, the importance of their status as exceptions to the rule of gender transcends temporal or political limitations reinforced by modern critical evaluations of exceptional women. The very act of writing self-consciously about their own experiences as women in the public sphere—either directly like Pizan and Albret or under layers of fiction like Villedieu—evidences that these women realized the ambitious selves so evident in their texts. Each writer wrote “on purpose.” Pizan and Villedieu wrote according to their patrons' tastes and answered the demands of their anticipated readership, while Albret eventually wrote to support a religion that in turn upheld her authority as autonomous queen. At the same time, all three took advantage of their status as writer to comment on society and on their place in society as ambitious women. This study is the first step to reexamining the *ancien régime* exception to the rule of gender's importance. Many ambitious women wrote and faced adversity during the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Further research will likely illustrate that other *ancien régime* women writing as exceptions to the rule of gender styled their identities in innovative ways in order to resist social constraints and achieve subjectivity. Future analyses will also offer a more comprehensive picture of the characteristics shared by *ancien régime* exceptional women writers. Studies such as these will reinforce the notion that exceptions of the *ancien régime* merit just as much critical attention as those women that appear in later centuries.

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## **Vita**

Lori Anne Knox graduated from Centenary College in 1998 with a Bachelor of Arts in French and a Bachelor of Science in Applied Science. In 2000, Knox began her graduate work at Louisiana State University in the Department of French Studies. In 2001, she received the departmental award for the most outstanding incoming graduate student before earning her Master's Degree in 2002. While at LSU, Knox taught many LSU undergraduate French classes and received several departmental awards for her teaching.

During the academic year 2004-05, Knox taught English at the University of Poitiers. She returned to Louisiana State University in 2005 to continue work on her dissertation. In 2006, she presented her preliminary ideas on Christine de Pizan at the LSU Women's and Gender Studies Conference.

During the 2006-07 academic year, Knox served as Program Coordinator for the LSU Women's and Gender Studies Program. She was an active member of the program's Coordinating Council. She completed many projects, including a ceremony, newsletter, and visual presentation commemorating the hundredth anniversary of LSU's first freshman class that included women students.

In 2006, Knox also served as assistant director for the LSU in the Ubaye Valley study abroad program. This unique immersion program offers students the opportunity to earn credit while interning in traditional French businesses. The program's aim is to improve students' cultural and linguistic understanding. She subsequently directed the program in 2007.

In 2007, she presented her work on Christine de Pizan at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference and her work on Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villegieu at the LSU Women's and Gender Studies Conference.

In October 2007, Knox successfully defended her dissertation entitled: *Exceptions to the Rule of Gender: Ambition, Writing, and Subjectivity in Christine de Pizan, Jeanne d'Albret and Marie-Catherine Desjardins de Villedieu*. She received her doctoral degree in December 2007.