‘IN HER OWN FASHION’: MARIE DE GOURNAY
AND THE FABRICATION OF THE WRITER’S PERSONA

by

Wendy Lynn Ring Freeman

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Terry and Ellen, who put me on the right path and for Chloé, Tatyana, Jessie-Lee and Madeleine who have been lighting the way ever since.
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ABSTRACT

Marie de Gournay (1565-1645) was bold. Following a profound, epiphanic experience while reading Montaigne’s *Essais*, she would turn the despair of a young woman, ambitiously seeking her own voice, into literary performances as part of a continuous exercise of staging herself. Indeed, she would fabricate for herself a mythic persona, a *Virgo nobilis*, in order to control her own destiny as an author, and as a literary, political and social commentator. She also had some very powerful friends and supporters. Following a prominent fifty-year career, though, she would virtually disappear from the French literary world. Shortly after her death, Gournay’s work was erased behind the ridicule, parodies and mystification that had targeted her during her lifetime. Gournay would become *counter-fashioned*, her own myths turned against her. My intent in this study of Gournay’s persona is to provide an example of the dynamics at work in subversive creations, specifically how the construct of Gournay evolved into what humanist Justus Lipsius had presaged as a *novum monstrum*.

I propose to analyze the fabrication of her persona from two different perspectives: first of all, from the point of view of her own self-fashioning, how she appears as both author and character of her own creation, putting into flux the notions of *copy – original* and *imitation – invention*. Critical theories on reception, self-fashioning, mystification, originality and feminism will be used within the context of the development of *politesse* and the *honnête homme*, in early modern France. Close study of
the works of fiction in which her persona appears, only to be mocked, and an analysis of
texts which praised her will then reveal how and why Gournay continues to suffer from
the binds constructed during the seventeenth century after which she, and many other
women writers, were no longer read. She was either scornfully dismissed, or simplified to
the point of distortion out of the need to classify and explain a woman whose positions
and actions rendered her a phenomenon in a patriarchal society where women were
excluded from creating meaning for themselves.
INTRODUCTION

“SES OUVRAGES NE SONT PLUS LUS DE PERSONNE”

(NICERON, 1731)

In 1731, not even one century after the death of Marie de Gournay (1565-1645), Jean-Pierre Nicéron’s *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des hommes illustres dans la république des lettres* would comment on her accomplishments in these terms:

*Rien ne peut égaler les éloges qu’elle a reçus pendant sa vie; & Dominique Baudius a poussé la flatterie à son égard, jusqu’à l’appeler la Sireine Françoise, & la dixième Muse. Mais on est bien revenu de toutes ces louanges, & quelque mérite qu’elle pût avoir par elle-même, ses Ouvrages ne sont plus lus de personne, & sont tombés dans un oubli dont ils ne se retireront jamais.*

Nicéron’s categorical pronouncement certainly sounds strange to a twenty-first-century reader who cannot ignore that, in addition to her famous editorial work on Montaigne’s *Essais* from 1595 to 1635, Gournay’s vast personal production includes not only fiction but poetry, translations, important treatises on language use and education as well as many socio-political commentaries, in particular seminal essays on the role of women.

Several books have been devoted to Gournay since 1962, when Anne Uildriks compiled her linguistic and literary treatises with a reedition of her famous *Preface sur les Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne* (1595) and all of their variants. One year later, Marjorie H. Ilsley’s milestone biography, *A Daughter of the Renaissance: Marie le

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*Jars de Gournay* (1963), did much to launch her works as credible subjects of inquiry. In 1988, when Elyane Dezon-Jones’s *Fragments d’un discours féminin* turned Gournay into the “première théoricienne de l’égalité des hommes et des femmes” (11), she also read her autobiographical work as a significant example of filiation between feminine writing and its idealized masculine model. Many articles that followed focused mostly on Gournay’s ties with Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), and two international conferences were devoted to that subject on the four-hundreth year anniversary of the 1595 edition of the *Essais*. From then on Gournay’s feminist work also started to figure in broader books on women writers. In 1990, Constant Venesoens’s study of French female authors of the seventeenth century listed her as a “talent méconnu” (13), and nine years later, Gournay was the representative of feminist thought from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century in *The Neglected Canon* (1999), an anthology of female philosophers from the first through the nineteenth centuries. In short, Gournay is now

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5 One conference on “Montaigne et Marie de Gournay” was held at Duke University; the proceedings were published twice: in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25.3 (1995) and in *Actes du colloque international de Duke* (Paris: Champion, 1997). The other conference, on “Marie de Gournay et l’édition de 1595 des *Essais* de Montaigne,” was held in Paris by the Société International des Amis de Montaigne; the proceedings were also published twice; see Jean-Claude Arnould, ed., *Actes du colloque de la SIAM de juin 1995* (Paris: Champion, 1996), and *BSAM* 7.1-3 (1996).


7 Therese Boos Dykeman ed., *The Neglected Canon* (Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer, 1999) 73-108. While other women writers are mentioned in the introductory section of the third chapter “Fourteenth Century: Before and After” (73-109), two of Gournay’s feminist texts, *The Equality of Men and Women* and *Complaints of Women* are presented in translation.
considered a classic, and indeed, I myself briefly heard of her works while conducting research for a graduate linguistics class at the Université de Lyon II before being reintroduced to her by Professor Leibacher of the University of Arizona. Yet, despite this recent surge of interest in Gournay, it is true that Nicéron’s old prediction on her work – not to say his wishful thinking – remained a constant for several centuries.

Indeed, even though Gournay’s work as editor to Montaigne’s *Essais* was monumental and attested to his faith in her judgment and intellectual capacity – no fewer than nine different editions were published under her guidance; some (in 1595, 1617, 1625 and 1635) with the “long” version of her Preface; others (in 1598, 1600, 1602, 1604 and 1611) with the “shorter” one – none of Gournay’s own work would be re-edited before 1910 – when Mario Schiff reintroduced two of her most famous treatises, *Égalité des hommes et des femmes* (1622) and *Grief des dames* (1626),⁸ – and it was only in 2002 that her *Oeuvres complètes* were compiled into a massive two-volume critical edition.⁹ A few years earlier I had read about her supposedly “obscure” linguistic treatises, so I was immediately intrigued by the paradox that her previous fame as a brilliant *femme d’esprit* should be followed by such a disappearing act until the late twentieth century. Was this a case of simple silence, or intentional silencing? Were centuries of scholars and critics

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⁸ Henceforth referred to as respectively, *Égalité* and *Grief*. See Mario Schiff, *La fille d’alliance de Montaigne, Mademoiselle de Gournay, suivi de L’Égalité des hommes et de femmes et du Grief des dames* (Paris: Champion, 1910).

justified in their neglect, or were they concerted in their obfuscation? Was Gournay’s reception part of a larger canon “de-formation” where women writers were concerned? And if so, how did this happen in her specific case?

Other women before Gournay had to brave the waves of literary oblivion. As Ann Jones and Nancy Vickers have argued, much of the formation of the Renaissance literary canon has been based on a critical policing that ended up dismissing women by constructing false reputations, either by conflating “sexual rumor and critical evaluation” (22), or by claiming that a man was behind a woman’s writing. Indeed what they see at work in, among other literary anthologies, Sainte-Beuve’s 1828 Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVIe siècle is nothing short of a “critical desire to subordinate women’s writings to men’s” (16). For instance, in establishing Marguerite de Navarre’s reputation through her alleged love affair with Clément Marot as a mentor; and in that regard, Louise Labé could be an even more fascinating case in point, especially since Mireille Huchon’s claim, just a few months ago, that Labé was in fact a mere “créature de papier” whose poetry was entirely fabricated by several male writers of her time.

Some noteworthy research has also already been done on exclusionary politics in French literature after Gournay’s own time. As Joan DeJean’s Tender Geographies

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11 Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Tableau historique et critique (1828; Paris: Charpentier, 1869).
has argued with humor, the most influential women writers of the mid- to late-seventeenth century were often viewed as threatening to the “nation-state, the family, and manly, virile virtue” (14). Madeleine de Scudéry, for instance, was embroiled in the Ancients against Moderns quarrels when Nicolas Boileau attacked her not only for writing a corrupt form of literature – the novel – but for feminizing, and thus degrading, the epic heroes of Greece and Rome in the process – a move which, as DeJean remarked in another book on Fin de Siècle cultural wars, was probably judged “worst of all” by the satirist (54). As Lise Leibacher has shown in her publications on various “Querelles d’autorité,” the works and personality of these women writers were not only critiqued but turned into fiction; many parts of Michel de Pure’s famous (yet anonymous) *La Prétieuse ou Le Mystère des ruelles* (1656-1658) or his *Epigone, histoire du siècle futur* (1659) were intended, she showed, as “palimpsestuous” parodies, literal and figurative “mises en abyme” of Scudéry as an old-fashioned writer of obsolete heroic novels. Of course, these various critiques and fictionalizations would also have the perverse effect of consecrating the very object they denigrated. But Boileau’s intent concerning Scudéry was clearly to erase her from literary history when his *Dialogue du héros du roman*  

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(1688) proudly claimed: “mais aujourd'hui qu'enfin la mort l'a rayée du nombre des humains, elle et tous les autres compositeurs de romans, je crois . . . Les voilà tombés dans l'oubli; on ne les lit presque plus.”\(^{16}\) There is little doubt that Nicéron plagiarized and applied this (in)famous statement to Gournay, in 1731, in his own mimetic effort to self-fashion himself after the master critic Boileau.

Clearly then, the attempt to subdue women writers was hardly unusual at the time. Yet, far from implying a trans- or a-historic, systematic exclusion of women, I believe that Marie de Gournay’s particular position in literary history was quite different from, say, Navarre’s or Scudéry’s, and that this position explained in great part her subsequent (if temporary) erasure from it. My contention is two-fold. First, that contrary, to other women’s persistent yet more discreet self-fashioning as writers, Gournay’s own construction was both more blatant and more pervasive as it involved many social practices and literary genres other than fiction – a bold behavior at a time in history when discipline and distinction were redefining many fields, and when new codes of social civility were imposing different expectations. Secondly, I contend that Gournay’s particularly explicit self-fashioning created the backlash of a counter-fashioning of sorts, which I see at work in the unusual number of texts published *explicitly* about her (not only critiques, but farces, poetry and fiction), not to mention the various mystifications whose intention was to ridicule her into submission. In rejecting this victimization vigorously, and in claiming a space *in her own fashion*, Marie de Gournay has, in my

opinion, played a doubly fundamental (if controversial) role in “la naissance de l’écrivain” that Alain Viala situates in the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{17}

Several theoretical concepts or analytical tools have proven particularly helpful to my study. Given my emphasis on the reception of Gournay’s works, the notion of “horizons of expectations” developed a few decades ago by Hans Robert Jauss in his \textit{Pour une esthétique de la réception} (1978), although criticized\textsuperscript{18} as too vague in its applications, has remained useful in stressing how this reception depended not only on the different roles occupied by the reader as “receiver” and “discriminator” (where the text is accepted or rejected) (15) but on the system of references in play at the time the work appeared: “L’esthétique de la réception exige que chaque œuvre soit replacée dans la “série littéraire” dont elle fait partie, afin que l’on puisse déterminer sa situation historique, son rôle et son importance dans le contexte général de l’expérience littéraire” (64). In a different way, and more importantly, this concern with the relationship between literature and cultural history also informs the notion of fashioning or self-fashioning that I will be using here. It can largely be traced back to the seminal research on civility that Maurice Magendie conducted on \textit{La Politesse mondaine} (1925) at the beginning of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{19} Shortly thereafter, Norbert Elias’s equally influential \textit{Civilisation des

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Alain Viala, \textit{La Naissance de l’écrivain. Sociologie de la littérature à l’âge classique} (Paris: Minuit: 1985).
\item \textsuperscript{18} Robert Holub speaks at length on criticisms of Jauss’s theory in \textit{Reception Theory: A critical introduction} (New York: Methuen, 1984): 53-63.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Maurice Magendie, \textit{La Politesse mondaine et les théories de l’honnêteté en France au XVIIe siècle, de 1600 à 1660}. (1925; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1993).
\end{itemize}
moeurs (1939)\textsuperscript{20} provided his own analysis of this disciplining process and its concomitant condemnation of any behavior that could be seen as uncivilized, contrary to “cultivé,” “poli,” or “policé” (57). Since then, sustained critical interest in this fascinating aspect of seventeenth-century French cultural history has led to different emphases, Elizabeth Goldsmith’s exploration of exclusive conversations,\textsuperscript{21} Danielle Trudeau’s analysis of the invention of \textit{bon usage},\textsuperscript{22} Emmanuel Bury’s focus on “l’invention de l’honnête homme,”\textsuperscript{23} or Joan DeJean’s \textit{Reinvention of Obscenity},\textsuperscript{24} to name but a few. More specifically, however, the terms of my analysis are indebted to Stephen Greenblatt’s definition of culture as “a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions…for the governing of behavior” (3)\textsuperscript{25} – and among them the practice that his \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning} (1980) defined as the “power to impose a shape upon oneself [as] an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one’s own” (1).

Related to the notion of fashioning is a concept of the nature and purpose of myth. The semantic possibilities of the word \textit{myth} are vast and “slippery,” as theologian J. W.  

Rogerson\textsuperscript{26} has stated, with definitions and theoretical groundings extending back to Greek philosophers and crossing many disciplines such as history, psychology, sociology, theology, political science and anthropology. In ancient Greece, \textit{muthos}, meaning “utterance” or “story,” could refer to a factual statement or to a falsehood. As myth scholar Thomas Sienkewicz\textsuperscript{27} explains, in English the word “myth,” in addition to referring to legends and folktales, can describe basic cultural features (the “frontier” myth) or ideological beliefs valued by some, but dismissed by others (“conspiracy” myths); the term can also embody characters, stories or things from works of literary fiction, in addition to controversies, half-truths and untruths. Of particular interest here is anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski’s\textsuperscript{28} view of myths as a social charter, “a statement of primeval reality which still lives in present-day life and as a justification by precedent, supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order . . . to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige . . . ” (146). Although Malinowski based his theory on the Trobriander islanders of the West Pacific, the fundamental principles can be applied to Western culture, and specifically his concept of myths as practical guides which act to govern and control many aspects of society and are called into action when collective rules are infringed upon or questioned. The role of women in these social charters has been studied by Tilde Sankovitch in \textit{Women Writers and the}

\textsuperscript{27} Thomas J. Sienkewicz, \textit{Theories of Myth} (Lantham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997) Pages 2-4 give an overview of the ambiguity of “myth.”  
where she defines the “nefarious processes of mythification” women undergo in traditional male tales that turn them into such mythic constructs as the femme fatale, the earth mother, or the “Christian polarities of the Virgin and the Whore” (4). Yet as Sankovitch has also shown, while many of these constructs of idealized glory or flattering mystery coopted women insidiously into their own domination, they could also reconstruct male myths in their own fashion, to achieve greater social value and prestige, as I claim Gournay did.

In many ways, Sankovitch’s analysis of women’s often tacit acceptance of male myths is close to the theory of “symbolic violence,” or paradoxical submission developed by Pierre Bourdieu in, among other works, “La Domination masculine” (1990; 1998). Many feminist critics have argued – Huguette Dagenais, Anne-Marie Devreux, Christine Delphy, Nicole-Claude Mathieu among others – that Bourdieu’s emphasis on gender as a naturalized construction was not particularly original and that – ironically in the context – it ignored most of the research already published by women critics on the

subject. Yet this work, in addition to Bourdieu’s earlier study *De la Distinction* (1979),\(^{32}\) is of particular relevance to my analysis, I believe, for developing masculine domination as a type of symbolic violence *par excellence*, and whose enduring and pervasive presence in everyday life cannot be overstated. Since social identity, as Bourdieu defines it, is founded on *habitus* – that is to say on the positions and dispositions acquired through the practice of living in a society which, in turn, ingrains habits of feeling, thought and behavior – the dominant (i.e. male) vision becomes inscribed in the discourses of both men and women alike, and symbolic violence results from the often unquestioned acceptance of the social mechanisms and institutions (family, school, church, state) that make that domination possible. Yet as Bourdieu also noted once, “Je n’ai jamais cessé […] de m’étonner devant ce que l’on pourrait appeler le paradoxe de la doxa […] qu’il n’y a[it] pas davantage de transgressions ou de subversions, de délits et de ‘folies.’”\(^{33}\) Far from being lulled into submission by “la violence douce, symbolique” of masculine domination, Gournay, I contend, was precisely one of the rogue few whose work and social practices did challenge – again and again – the family, state and church discourses on the allegedly “natural” inferiority of women.

Interestingly, the counter-fashioning and stereotypical re-mythification which Gournay brought upon herself because of her numerous “délits” and “folies” began with acts of *mystification*. The term itself is anachronistic in the seventeenth century, but as


Paul Lacroix noted in 1875, in the first theoretical work devoted to the subject, “mystificateurs” and therefore “mystifiés” have been present throughout time, well before the word was accepted into French. The word originated in the mid-eighteenth century when a young poet, Antoine Poinsinet, branded as ignorant and vain, fell victim to numerous jokes and pranks, originally called *poinsinetades*, then *mystifications*. The word found its way into print in 1773 when Jean Monet published *Les Mystifications du petit P*** and gave an explanation of the word: “On entend par mystifications les pièges dans lesquels on fait tomber un homme simple et crédule, qu’on veut persifler.” The word was then accepted by the Académie française with the same meaning. Indeed, defined as “a kind of society game in which a group was made to laugh at the expense of a chosen victim,” this concept, whose application I then borrowed from Reginald McGinnis’s “Critique of Originality in French Letters” of the Enlightenment (30), can be applied to Gournay’s case as well. In 1690, when Furetière’s dictionary presented...

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35 Cited by Lacroix (10).  
36 Reginald McGinnis, “The Concept of Originality in French Letters,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 31 (2002): 127-143. Jeandillou also insists on the collective nature of this activity, which he links to the tradition of the “grosse plaisanterie” before tracing the word’s evolution to include “mystification littéraire” as a synonym of “supercherie” (13-14), a society game that can be used to single out an individual to mock or trick for the simple amusement of a group, or to expose, if not denounce, some perceived fault, misconception, or transgressive behavior of its victim.  
original as a noun, he described this “substantif masculin” as follows: “On appelle proverbialement et ironiquement un original, un homme qui est ridicule et singulier en ses manières, qui fait rire par la nouveauté de ses actions,” a pejorative connotation which, as McGinnis noted for the mid-eighteenth century, tended to reduce “originality to a form of mimesis” (138). This term was also anachronistic in Gournay’s time. Yet the concept of the “original” as a flawed copy is, I believe, a relevant tool of critical inquiry into the different types of mystifications or comedy where Gournay was made to play a role. It was this process of public exposure that constructed her as an originale in opposition to the norms of polite society, much before a nineteenth-century critic such as Paul Musset would portray her as one of the “extravagants et originaux” of the seventeenth century.38 In turn, it was also this transgression of the prevalent code of discretion that, in my opinion, explained in part the growing negative reception that she received, and her subsequent erasure from literary history for several centuries.

Before 2002, attempting to establish a global view of Gournay’s self-fashioning would have been daunting, not only due to her language but to the complexity of her writing strategies – she repeatedly edited and reedited, displaced and redistributed, shortened or lengthened parts of her texts, integrated new texts into older ones and occasionally changed dates of publication. Since 2002, the critical edition of her complete works (including their different variants) has made possible different types of inquiry. Some articles have already presented excellent overviews of Gournay’s

reception, most notably Marie-Thérèse Noiset’s emphasis on how l’“écart esthétique de son oeuvre” varied throughout different periods;³⁹ or the milestone paper on “(Re)Fashioning Marie de Gournay” (2002) in which Nancy Frelick has argued convincingly that many twentieth-century critics who claim to advance Gournay as a serious subject of scholarly inquest “still seem invested (consciously or unconsciously) in reinscribing her in the old phallic order.”⁴⁰ To date, however, no detailed and systematic study has been devoted yet to Gournay’s self-fashioning as a writer and to the counter-fabrication that followed, a series of transgressions that, in my opinion, may explain (at least in part) the growing negative reception she received, and her subsequent erasure from literary history for several centuries. Without claiming to provide an exhaustive analysis, this is the goal that my current project will limit mostly to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Chapter 1, “Gournay’s Self-fashioning or les enjeux du je,” begins my analysis of Gournay with a brief overview of her texts to illustrate that a pattern of self-fashioning was in fact established quite early in her life as seen in title of her first publication Le Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne. Par sa fille d’alliance (1594),⁴¹ a reference to a walk she and Montaigne took together. My focus is on the interplay between the different pieces that accompany Promenoir. Analyzed together, we see that Gournay crafted


⁴¹ Henceforth referred to as Promenoir.
herself by weaving together thematic content and personal aspirations with social and political commentary. She uses this same technique in another early text, *Bien-venue de Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou* (1608), whose liminary letter shows that Gournay was already, at this point in her career, concerned with preserving her posterity.

In 1626 Gournay published a series of texts that can be grouped under the heading of *moralia*, where she makes public her adamant refusal to participate in the new social codes of civility. Social and political commentary figure prominently in Gournay’s specifically linguistic and autobiographical texts as well. They highlight the structuring principle of Gournay’s literary persona: invention through imitation, with an occasional fabrication. The relationship she maintains between tradition and innovation is exactly what renders Gournay’s feminist tracts, *l’Égalité* and *Grief* of particular interest. The first autobiographical text, *Copie de la Vie de la damoiselle de Gournay* (1641), is another subversion of sorts. “Pincture de mœurs” (1626) is a character portrait in verse whose themes are amply developed in a third text “Apologie pour celle qui escrit” (1626). Its title evokes a classic model upon which she is constructing herself – Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*. In this two-part text she defends her name against incessant calumny and personal attacks against her, based largely on her position as a woman seeking access to literary forums.

Chapter 2, “Mystification and the *mise en scène* of Gournay’s Persona” will include the works of fiction in which her persona appears and I will illustrate how her

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42 Henceforth referred to as *Copie*.
43 Henceforth referred to as *Pincture* and *Apologie*. 
self-fashioning, her mimesis of traditionally male interests and occupations, exposed her to mystification, whereby she became the target of pranks and jokes for the amusement of a group. These works include political tracts, anecdotes, satires and poetry that make light of her age, linguistic principles, attachment to Montaigne, her virginity or a combination of these, and this, despite Gournay’s favorable reception by many prominent figures of her time. The various pieces all function together as educational tools, showing the public the codes that govern society.

Gournay’s mystification first began after she published a political tract, *La Defence des Peres Jesuites* as part of a larger essay, *Adieu de l’Ame du Roy de France et de Navarre Henry le Grand* (1610). A scathing satire would respond to Defence, not only attacking her good judgment but degrading her as a person. What was most remembered about her tract was not Gournay’s erudite defense, but the anonymous parody which countered it, *Le Remerciment des Beurrieres de Paris, Au Sieur de Courbouzon Montgommery* (1610) in which she is accused of being a “public woman.”

Among the poetry presented in this chapter is Saint-Amant’s “Le Poët crotté” (1633) and François Mainard’s 1632 *Le cabinet satyrique*, which portray Gournay as an object of mockery with the common misogynist themes of sexuality, age, vanity and physical beauty. She also appears in many farces making light of the newly created

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44 Henceforth the entire tract will be referred to as *Adieu* and Gournay’s defence of the Jesuits as *Defence*.
Académie française such as Gilles Ménage’s *Requête des dictionnaires* (1636),\(^{47}\) Antoine Gaillard’s *La Furieuse Monomachie* (1634),\(^{48}\) *Rôle des présentations* by Charles Sorel (1634)\(^{49}\) and Saint-Evremond’s *Comédie des Académistes* (1638).\(^{50}\) These works all portray Gournay as an old woman whose entire existence revolves around saving a handful of antiquated language from linguistic banishment. They do not neglect, to varying degrees, disparaging, and thus dismissive comments of her as a woman which had become *monnaie courante* in criticisms of her.

In Chapter 3, “Novum Monstrum: Mystification by (Re)Mythification,” the thesis I develop is that a summary reading of the various texts written by well-intentioned biographers and friends is not as contradictory to the sneers and mockery of her detractors as one might suppose. Gournay’s persona is transformed into an object of caricature that will remain intact despite the widely accepted notion that she was a *femme d’esprit*. Both camps, the pro- and the anti-Gournay, in fact, make repeated references to Gournay’s association with her covenant father, Montaigne, but neither do anything to reveal the scope of his influence on her literary and philosophical positions.

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\(^{47}\) Gilles Ménage, *Requête présentée par les dictionnaires à Messieurs de l’Académie pour la réformation de la langue française*. slnd, 1646.


Correspondence written by Étienne Pasquier\textsuperscript{51} would do much to fashion Gournay as an epic heroine. I will also analyze different letters between Gourna, Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac\textsuperscript{52} and Jean Chapelain\textsuperscript{53} as they illustrate two aspects of Gourna’s persona: her attempts to align herself with important figures of the literary scene, but also the thinly disguised disdain that her contemporaries displayed for her as a woman trying to network in a man’s world. For Gournay, the stakes involved in corresponding with someone of his stature were tempting and she strove to gain his ear in current debates. His responses to her letters would do nothing to advance her own reputation as they were couched in terms of eloquent degradation, skillfully playing on dismissive tactics such as her (old) age and (lack of) beauty.

I advance that despite some avid support, her non-conformism was so extensive for her time that she was accorded no mobility. Greenblatt states that “A life that fails to conform at all, that violates absolutely all the available patterns, will have to be dealt with as an emergency – hence exiled, or killed, or declared a god” (229).\textsuperscript{54} Gournay was one such emergency, forced into literary exile. Many of her contemporaries wrote poetry dedicated to her after her death. Hilarion de Coste relates in Les Eloges et vies des reynes, Lane First Reception of Montaigne’s Essays (1580-1640) (Geneva: Slaktine Reprints, 1995) 143-49.


\textsuperscript{52} Different letters discussed in Chapter 3 can be found in Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, Les Premières Lettres de Guez de Balzac 1618-1627, ed. H. Bibas and K.-T. Butler vol. 1 (Paris: Droz, 1933); Lettres, ed. Philippe Tamizey de Larroque (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1873) or Oeuvres vol. 1 (1665; Geneva: Slktine Reprints, 1971).


princesses, dames et demoiselles Illustres (1647)\textsuperscript{55} how many other prominent people of her time expressed their willingness to assure her protection, admiration or friendship such as François la Mothe le Vayer or Guillaume Colletet.\textsuperscript{56} Michel Marolles’s Mémoires (1656)\textsuperscript{57} claim that Gournay had a decisive role in the birth of the Académie française. Marguerite Buffet’s Nouvelles Observations sur la langue française (1668)\textsuperscript{58} presents a sympathetic eulogy as does Jacquette Guillaume’s Les Dames Illustres (1665).\textsuperscript{59} Her notability, though, was often couched in references to her gender, fille, vierge, personne de son sexe, accompanied occasionally by the condescending qualification of bonne. It is my contention that Gournay’s friends and supporters suffered from the weight of centuries of misogynist discourse to the point that, even in their praise, they unconsciously remythify Gournay, reducing her to the position of the sc\textipa{c}avante defender of Montaigne. In the ultimate act of (unconscious) dismissal, François Ogier\textsuperscript{60} rewrote Gournay’s intended tombstone inscription, despite her expressed wishes.

I will concentrate my analysis in Chapter 4, “The Consecration and Desecration of Gournay as Literary Product,” on two very successful works: Pierre Bayle’s

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\begin{itemize}
\item Guillaume Colletet, Épigrammes du sieur Colletet (Paris: Louis Chambourdry, 1653) 74.
\item Michel Marolles, Mémoires 3 vols. (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1656) 289.
\item Marguerite Buffet, Nouvelles observations sur la langue française (Paris: Jean Cusson 1668) 291-93.
\item Jacquette Guillaume, Les Dames illustres (Paris: Thomas Jolly: 1665) 292.
\end{itemize}
}
My global interpretation of the critiques of Gournay in these works is that they articulate and perpetuate the cultural norms that had previously produced the persona of Gournay, even though that may have not been the intent of Bayle. In his *Dictionnaire*, Bayle was the first of his generation to defend Gournay’s linguistic principles: “Mais, tout bien considéré, cette demoiselle n’avait pas autant de tort que l’on s’imagine” (190). He deemed her preface to the 1635 edition of *Essais* “worth reading.” If he evokes unfavorable criticisms of her looks and lifestyle, it is to show that judgments are too often passed based on appearances rather than a systematic examination of facts.

Tallemant’s *Historiettes* played a seminal role in the construction of Gournay’s persona. In a spiteful tone, he gives a series of anecdotes concerning Gournay’s encounters with Richelieu, Boisrobert and Malherbe’s followers, in which she is made the target of jokes, pranks and vicious verbal attacks. Tallemant’s work provides a broad-range counter appreciation of seventeenth-century culture that can be palliated, in most cases, by other sources. Gournay, however, was a case apart; she did not benefit from any serious critical study of her work. The pointed attacks on her person muffled the rare praise bestowed on her work, and *Historiettes* played a most decisive role in future receptions, despite Tallemant’s reputation as a scandal seeker. Regardless of the negative contexts in which Gournay was portrayed in the seventeenth century, the fact remains

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61 Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire critique et historique*, vol.1 (Rotterdam: Leers, 1697) and *Dictionnaire critique et historique*, vol. 7 (Paris: Desoer, 1820).
that she is now seriously studied on an international level. Her posterity could have suffered a worse fate as Boileau noted, “Il est de l’essence d’un bon livre d’avoir des censeurs; et la plus grande disgrâce qui puisse arriver à un écrit qu’on met au jour, ce n'est pas que beaucoup de gens en disent du mal, c'est que personne n'en dise rien.”

CHAPTER 1

GOURNAY’S SELF-FASHIONING OR LES ENJEUX DU JE

BIRTH OF LA FILLE D’ALLIANCE

Even though Gournay’s biography is relatively well-known and well-documented, the brief overview that is necessary to situate her establishes that pursuing her own interests and putting herself forward began early in her life. She was born Marie le Jars, the eldest of six children in a family of the lower nobility. Her father, Guillaume le Jars held important court positions under Charles IX (d. 1574) and Henri III (d. 1589), and in 1568 he purchased the feudal rights to the estate and castle of Gournay-sur-Aronde, a small town in Picardy, thus becoming Seigneur de Gournay. A few years after his death, in 1577, the family moved to this estate to escape both the financial strain of living in Paris and the civil Wars of Religion. It was there that Gournay taught herself Latin as well as some Greek, and began reading classical and modern literature with a passion in the belief that the wisdom gained by a classical education led to the virtue of moral superiority – a concept that was called suffisance, a word she used frequently. Her taste in authors would not waiver in her lifetime and neither would her adherence to the humanist principle of virtue. From Latin virtus, meaning “quality of man,” vir, virtue was a moral value and, as Furetière defined it later, implied “Qui a de la force et de la vigueur . . . vertueux, se dit aussi parmi les curieux, de ceux qui s'adonnent à la recherche des belles

64 For Gournay’s bibliographic information I have drawn mainly on Isley’s chapter “Early years” in A Daughter of the Renaissance (11-22).
choses, qui ont du goust pour les arts, les sciences, et les curiositez naturelles,” a description that aptly situates Gournay.

_Essais, hysteria and the taking of “Gournay”_

When Gournay was eighteen or nineteen, around 1584, she discovered the second edition of Montaigne’s _Essais_ (1582) which sent her into such a mystical trance that her mother came close to administering hellebore, a narcotic used, among other things, to treat mental disorders and hysteria. In Montaigne’s _Essais_, Gournay found all the qualities she admired in the classics and, more importantly to her own future writing, the way to relate classic teachings to moral, philosophical and political discussions of the time. Richard Hillman (6) has characterized this momentous discovery as “a virtual lifeline, by which she was able, it seems, to pull herself to a precarious safety, psychologically if not practically.” It was also, I would contend, a form of self-empowerment, a permission to explore her own self that worked as a catalyst for her first public act of self-fashioning. The proud title of “de Gournay” that her father had purchased, Marie would take for her own in the late 1580s, despite the fact that by inheritance laws, only her younger brother, Charles, was entitled to it. Upon learning that Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius also admired Montaigne, she entered into

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correspondence with him, signing her name “Gournay,” thereby granting herself the
distinction – ever so important for her era – that went along with the aristocratic title.67

Parallel agendas in Bien-venue de Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou

“De Gournay” was in all probability also the signature she used in her first letter to Montaigne when they both were in Paris in 1588. Gournay’s mother had taken her to Paris to be introduced at the court, perhaps in the hopes of finding a marriage prospect. Her first encounter with courtly life, described in retrospect in Bien-venue de Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou (1608), underscores two of Gournay’s characteristics, her audacity and her disdain for the airs and ignorance of those who sought the attention of the royal family. The pretext for this piece was to welcome into the world Gaston d’Orléans, the third son of Marie de Médicis. Gournay is obviously aware that she is treading on the royal foundation of laws and institutions and justifies, somewhat ironically, her impetuosity by referring to her position as a woman: “Ah mon Dieu! Pardonnez-moi Sire, d’oser armer ma quenaille pour me mesler à ces discours; les querelles m’ayans si souvent interressée en mes proches, outré la pitié du public, que la passion qui me transporte à les quereller, à tous hazards, est excusable” (1: 175). In itself a tribute to a new member of the royal family was common for writers to pay, but what is singular in Gournay’s case is that in addition to advice on the education of the princes, she includes biting criticism of the French court:

67 Gournay’s first letter to Lipsius is lost. However, his response, dated 30 September 1588, is addressed to “MARIAE GORNACENSF” (2: 1832), leading to my inference that she had signed her name “Gournay.”
Ma mère par tendre soin de ma bienseance, me fit voir quelque bout de lisière de Court, afin de me dresser aux formes: mais elle s’y trompa, car au lieu d’en apprendre de nouvelles, je mesprisay plus d’une moitié de celles que j’avois apportées de soubz son aisle, par le peu d’estime, que j’allay faire des testes de ceux, que je vis practiquer cet art plus curieusement que les autres: jugeant, non trop impertinemment, quoy que fort jeune, alors, qu’aux fats plaisoient specialement les fadaises, et non guere au rebours. (1: 180).

Another layer of complexity in Gournay’s positioning in Bien-venue concerns the supposed addressee of the text, the Republic of Venice, under the dogat of Leonardo Donato. The Republic had been named parrain, godfather, for Gaston d’Orléans and, as such, it was theoretically conceivable that it be concerned with his education.

It is very doubtful though that Donato or any other member of the leadership of Venice ever saw the treatise, for that was not Gournay’s intent. On the contrary, I advance that Gournay used the formal arrangement of parrainage and her philosophy on education – a noble concern for the welfare of the nation – as the foreground to voice her desire for a more favorable reputation than the ambient male contempt she usually received. She recognizes that her own passion guides her candor but feels compelled to speak out – with her usual irony – against misconceptions: “je suis bien fort depitée contre les jugemens de nostre temps en matiere d’escrits; veu que cestuy-cy d’abondant est hors de mon gibier, que je suis foible outre cela d’entendement et de robe, opiniastre à me parer de la plume d’autry” (1: 163). Her apprehension over her reputation leads her on a circuitous discussion that begins with finding the young prince a proper tutor, “Qui premierement te choisira Gouverneur sortable, aura trouvé pour toy la pierre philosophale,” and ends with a justification of her expenses on alchemy, “. . . cet art-là,
duquel on m’estime si coiffée: je dis s’il n’avoit, comme il a de faict, quelque voye de pratique, que j’ay seule esprouvée, sans despense de poix; et plus saine . . . que ce que le vulgaire en barbouille par toute l’Europe” (1:167). Instead of addressing the royal family directly – a tactic she will employ later in her career – she fronts her discourse with an alleged, yet altogether conceivable, addressee to whom she explicitly expresses her concern for the future of the nation, all indirectly infused with her personal causes. Gournay draws a parallel between herself and the nation at large; a socio-political climate that would be more favorable to her intellectual pursuits, would also benefit France, for it is only by way of a humanist education that suffisance is acquired, Gournay’s touchstone of any great leader.

**Pretexts for texts in *Le Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne***

After 1608, Gournay’s life would be replete with instances where she dared “arm her distaff to meddle” in the discourse of men. Her contempt for ignorance and the ways *(les formes)* of courtly life were briefly set aside when she discovered that Montaigne was in Paris. She sent him a note praising his *Essais* and expressing her wish to meet him. According to her own autobiographical *Copie de la Vie de la Damoselle de Gournay* (1641), Montaigne visited her the next day and offered to be her covenant father, an alliance, as she describes it, that she herself had made happen: “s’estant de sa part promis en son coeur une telle alliance de luy depuis la premiere inspection de son Livre” (2: 1836). This passage bears witness to Gournay’s single-mindedness of purpose and her belief in the role she had to play in her own destiny. Following this first meeting,
Montaigne would in fact spend several months at Gournay-sur-Aronde, and one can only imagine the glory she must have felt to have the sage discussing his writings with her. Her personal experience with Montaigne would confirm her conviction in her own *suffisance*. Unfortunately, as I will bring out in this chapter, we have no other documentation, except Gournay’s, to either confirm or infirm her accounts of their initial meeting or the origins of her first publication.

For the reader whose initial encounter with Marie de Gournay is through her very first work, *Le Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne*, the reaction will most likely be one of puzzlement. For the title of this piece – a *histoire tragique* which was also Gournay’s only work of prose fiction – bears no apparent relationship at all with Montaigne or his *Essais*. Instead, *Promenoir* recounts a tragic love affair which takes place in ancient Persia and culminates in the double suicide of the heroine and the lover who had betrayed her. Yet this perplexing title is revealing in its own way, especially when viewed with the other works that accompany it. The title itself, as Gournay recounts in her dedicatory epistle to Montaigne, was inspired by a walk they took together and is placed under the shadow of one of his own intellectual fathers: “Vous entendez bien, mon pere, que je nomme cecy vostre ‘Promenoir,’ parce qu’en nous proumenans ensemble, il n’y a que trois jours, je vous contay l’histoire qui suit; comme j’en fus mise à propos par la lecture que nous venions de faire d’un subject de mesme air des tragiques accidens de l’Amour en Plutarque” (2: 1283). Gournay’s explanation here of her tale – both literal and figurative – brings out several sides of her self-fashioning.
First of all, she is adept at creating *mises en abîme* to underscore her literary and intellectual filiation. In this epistle, she parallels her link to Montaigne with that of his to Plutarque, whose *Dialogue sur l’amour* provides Gournay with a plausible source of her story. Her citing of this source, however, is a tactic of obfuscation to draw the reader away from the true source of *Promenoir*. The story itself is loosely based on Claude de Taillemont’s *Discours des Champs Faëz* (1553), a fact that Gournay claims to have forgotten: “Quand à mon Ouvrage present, je rapport à peu près l’argument de ce Conte, d’un Livre dont le nom m’est eschappé de la mémoire” (2: 1285). Her selective memory loss is hardly credible if one considers her mastery of hundreds of other texts and their respective authors. With an interlocutor as important as Montaigne – to whom she supposedly told this tragic tale while on a walk at Gournay-sur-Aronde – we have to believe that she would have, at some point over the years of its editions, discovered this book’s source. Then, there is the title of “adopted daughter,” which appears as a subheading to *Promenoir*. This *alliance* provides Gournay with a sort of social mask behind which she can preserve a degree of (feigned) anonymity, expected from a woman of her status. She would also veil herself behind the Montaigne family name to account for the publication of the volume in its editions from 1594 to 1607.

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69 Arnould speaks (2: 1283 Note A) of Montaigne’s fascination with Plutarque during a period of his life, as Montaigne himself recalls in *Essais* (3.5, 875 B).
70 Claude de Taillemont, *Discours des Champs faëz* (Lyon: Michel du Bois, 1553).
Until 1626, *Promenoir* contained a notice from the printer, a thinly disguised justification by Gournay herself, as to how the book found its way into print, “messieurs ses [Montaigne’s] parens me l’ont fait apporter” (2: 1867). The “imprimeur” claims that it was Montaigne’s own family who thought the work might bring him honor if it were published. Oddly, the Preface Gournay had written for the 1595 edition of the *Essais* reappears in the 1599 and 1607 editions of *Promenoir*, but again a comment from the “printer” justifies the new addition. This is the same preface that Gournay had removed, literally ripping it out of copies she sent to Lipsius, following heavy criticism of opportunism. Posing as the printer, Gournay states that the Preface was added to her book so as it would not get lost, “pour ne pas la laisser perdre” (2: 1867). In the 1623 notice from the “printer,” there is no longer a reference to Montaigne, but only the statement that the story had been written long ago.

This short passage is in fact a justification for Gournay’s use of Latin citations and of “quelque mot rejeté par le nouveau r’affinage de la langue des Courtisans” (2: 1867). After criticizing the poor manners of members of the nobility – a theme she later develops in “De la Neantise” (1626) – she falls back on a phrase from *Bien-venue* seen above, stating, “... elle ne s’entend point à se parer des plumes d’autrui: et qu’elle est glorieuse jusques à ces termes, de mieux aymer que son ouvrage demeure le plus chetif

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de nôtre aage, que de le devoir à la suffisance du tiers et du quart, à la mode qui court aujourd’hui trop vulgairement” (2: 1868, my emphasis). The themes and language here leave little to wonder about the true identity of the printer. She seems to want to explain away these incongruities in 1626 in a notice to the new edition of Promenoir – written as herself – by claiming that the novel “ayant esté mis au jour dès ma jeunesse, je croirois avoir autant de tort de refuser quelques Dames du premier rang, qui me commandent de luy faire revoir la lumiere” (2: 1272).

Quite clearly, Gournay’s Promenoir and the texts that accompany it are largely marked by their relationship to others, the “Dames de premier rang” or most importantly to Montaigne. However, as Jean-Claude Arnould has argued, the scenario surrounding the origin of Promenoir was probably entirely fabricated by Gournay herself. Arnould bases this hypothesis on several key points, one of which was that she failed to mention Promenoir in a 1593 letter to Justus Lipsius whereas she does mention some poetry she had written four years prior, shortly before the time she would have written Promenoir. The title first appears in a letter written in 1596, which leads Arnould to comment that “On saisit mal ce qui aurait pu pousser M. de Gournay à taire dans la première lettre, où elle parle si volontiers de ses écrits, l’existence du ‘Promenoir’” (2: 1282 Note B). Marie-Thérèse Noiset counters the arguments advanced by Arnould, prompting her to question how Montaigne’s family would have reacted to “un tel étalage d’opportunisme” (Marie

72 This argument is developed in Œuvres complètes (2: 1282 Note B) and in Jean-Claude Arnould, “L’Histoire du ‘Promenoir’.”
Michèle Fogel\textsuperscript{73} provides an interesting answer to Noiset question which goes to support Arnould earlier claim of literary fabrication. It is possible, Fogel asserts, that the first publication of *Promenoir* was an arrangement which suited everybody involved for different reasons: Gournay, Montaigne’s family, their friend and advisor, Pierre Le Brach and even Abel L’Angelier, Montaigne’s publisher.

Pushing this argument further, I would contend that Gournay’s choice of translations, the *Second Book of Aeneid*, was not innocent either. Besides the fact that she was positioning herself as a respectable translator of a classical text, an occupation of learned men, the opening verses by Virgil are quite revealing as to Gournay’s own preoccupations: “All were attentive to the godlike man, / When from his lofty couch he thus began: / ‘Great queen, what you command me to relate / Renews the sad remembrance of our fate’” (2.1-4). Indeed, with references to mythic figures or “godlike” men, claims that the writing was commissioned (“commandé”) by some prominent person, and the pervading sense of nostalgia of a golden age, this brief passage already contains many features that Gournay will further develop in later works.

The last section of this volume displays these same themes and self-fashioning techniques. Gournay added over fifty pieces of verse dedicated to various prominent people of the time and assembled them under the title of “Bouquet poétique ou meslanges.” Among them is a sonnet to Catherine de Gonzague, wife of Henri d’Orléans, duc de Longueville who, along with her father and son, would at different times hold the

position of Governor of Picardie. It is not surprising to find the duke’s family honored by poetry. Not only was Gournay’s family domain in Picardy but perhaps more pertinently, in 1594, she found herself struggling to maintain ownership of the estate, and the esteem of a highly placed official could be of interest to her. In her dedication “A Mademoiselle de Longueville,” Gournay includes the mention “qui luy comandoit d’escrire” (2: 1874), which gives both reason and credence to her verse and palliates what could be seen as purely personal and financial reasons for the sonnet. For good measure she also includes an epigram for Charles de Bourbon, comte de Soissons, a maternal cousin, and several pieces dedicated to Montaigne, his widow, daughter, brothers, sisters and various in-laws. Analyzed together, these various texts collected in her seminal Promenoir reveal that strategies for self-fashioning as an author were already at work from the very outset of a literary career that would eventually span fifty years and many different genres except (strangely) drama. The lynchpin between all the different pieces in Promenoir is Gournay’s intellectual ambition, a will to gain access to the Republic of Letters that would manifest itself time and again.

**TRANSGRESSING CIVILITY: “LES CERVEAUX IMBECILES”**

At a time when imitation was a structuring concept – religious with the imitation of Christ; literary with the imitation of the classics – in imitating men of letters, Gournay

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74 Bibliographic information on Catherine de Gonzague is from Oeuvres Complètes (2: 1874-75 Note B).

75 Her mother, Jeanne d’Hacqueville, died in 1591, and Gournay would lose the estate in 1609. This affair is discussed in more detail below.
was also constructing herself as a writer, thus turning imitation into invention. Yet as mentioned earlier, this was also the time in early modern France when books of conduct began to shape social codes more explicitly. The seventeenth century started to fashion itself as a period of distinction and politeness, “sinon toujours dans les mœurs, du moins dans les goûts et dans l’esprit,” as Magendie explains in his introduction to *L’Honnête homme; ou l’art de plaire à la cour* (1630 III),\(^{76}\) one of the most well-known treatises on the subject at the time. Published eleven times between 1630 and 1681, this book of conduct written by Nicolas Faret owed a great debt to Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano, The Book of the Courtier* (1528).\(^{77}\) Adapting it to his French public, Faret gives precise advice on how to become an ideal courtier during the reign of Louis XIII, in essence publishing a guide on how to please the King and stay in favor at court: “Or la premiere et la plus utile leçon que l’on doit pratiquer, c’est de gagner d’abord l’opinion des grands et des honnestes gens, et de tâcher à meriter les bonnes graces des femmes, qui on la reputation de donner le prix aux hommes . . . ” (40). The honnête homme, Faret emphasizes, is prudent, reserved and “se garde bien . . . de vouloir faire l’original à inventer de nouvelles façons” (92).

Even a cursory survey of other writings by Gournay reveals – in addition to the breadth of her interests – both her distance from such notions of civility and the transgressive interplay between imitation and invention in her work. Gournay manifests


her indignation with new social and linguistics codes often, and the title of this section, “les cerveaux imbeciles” (1: 100) is just one instance among many where she leaves no doubt as to what she thinks of the cultural trends of her time. After 1608, she began to assert her own voice and venture into an arena where women did not evolve, that of political and social commentary. Her *moralia* include: “Des fausses devotions,” “Si la vengeance est licite,” “Antipathie des ames basses et hautes,” “Consideration sur quelques contes de Cour,” “Advis à quelques gens d’Eglise,” “Que les grands esprits et les gens de bien s’entrecherchent,” “De la neantise de la commune vaillance de ce temps et du peu de prix de la qualité de Noblesse,” “Que l’integrité suit la vraye suffisance,” “Des Vertus vicieuses,” “Des grimaces mondaines,” “De l’impertinente amitié,” and “Des sottes ou presomptives finesses.” The running theme of these essays is the denunciation of calumny and Gournay’s contempt of the new social codes of civility that were developing, replacing the values based on principles of humanism. Anna Lia Franchetti summarizes the focus of Gournay’s critique when stating that *Les Advis, ou les Presens de la demoiselle de Gournay* (*Ombre* was renamed in 1634) is a condemnation of “la perversité d’un art de plaire qui n’est autre qu’un art de flatter; et le dévoiement d’une société où le non-conformiste . . . est presque inévitablement cible de calomnies” (93). What in fact reigns in the salons and the Court is false virtue, at the

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78 “Du Langage françois” (1626).
expense of those who cannot, or do not want to participate in the construction of the
*honnête homme*.

Marie de Gournay’s contempt of flattery was based on its inherent moral dishonesty. Her disdain for this developing *politesse*, as elaborated by Faret and others, was not limited to courtiers, but lashed out to women as well:

> Laissons aux garses corporelles le soin de referrer les ajolivemens du corps, aux ornemens de la Vertu, et resignons aux spirituelles, ainsi dois-je appeller les ames qui se coiffent de ces visions de scrupules par suffisance poupine; la charge de mettre en escrivant ou lisant, la politesse ou le fard d’un Œuvre, à plus haut prix que le couronnement du succes pour lequel il est entrepris. (1: 1021)

The above passage is from “Des Diminutifs françois” (1626), and it highlights how Gournay’s distaste of the evolutions in French society was not restricted to essays specifically addressing social issues, but embedded in most of her pieces, including her linguistic treatises.

**Defending the Ancients against toute la bande**

Another debate in which Gournay found herself on the losing side was the literary quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. Gournay staunchly defended sixteenth-century language and the humanist style of writing which were considered archaic by Malherbe and other writers and critics. Their modernist position is viewed as ultimately triumphant, becoming the norm through the ideological construction of notions such as polite society and proper language usage. Gournay’s publication of her positions on poetry and linguistics, between 1619 and 1641, would culminate in a three-part essay, her most elaborate work on linguistics, “Deffence de la Poësie et du langage des Poetes” (1:
1083-1200). As will be developed later in the body of the dissertation, her choice of titles is far from coincidental. Using the technique of *imitatio*, Gournay positions herself as the upholder of Du Bellay’s 1549 treatise, *Deffence et Illustration de la langue française*, in favor of embellishing the French language with latinisms, regionalisms, archaisms, metaphors and diminutives.

Several other short essays make reference to and are referenced by “Deffence”: “Du langage François,” “Sur la Version des Poetes antiques, ou des Metaphores,” “Des Rymes” and “Des Diminutifs Français” all first published in *Ombre*. She uses the metaphor of a young girl throwing a tantrum after losing a doll, to illustrate her attitude towards purging words from French: “Je l’envie sur le trait d’une petite garcette, qui se lamentoit à hauts cris pour la perte de sa poupée, et sa mere estant accourue en haste au secours avec une autre aussi joviale, elle la receut bien à deux mains: toutefois elle recommença de plus belle à crier, alleguant ; que sans la perte de la premiere elle en eust eu deux alors (1: 1118). As Cathleen Bauschatz has argued, Gournay’s negative, defensive posturing when faced with the changes taking place in the seventeenth century “is what earned her ridicule and derision at her time but it also makes her work extremely useful as a sort of measuring stick for the changes which were in fact taking place around her (279).”

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A 1626 text, *De la façon d’escrire de Messieurs du Perron et Bertault, qui sert d’Avertissement sur les Poesies de ce volume*, is a long discussion of Gournay’s philosophy on translation, the evolution of the French language and a condemnation of the ignorance of the Court and salons. Her boldness is evident: “J’ose, diray-je de rechef, sur leur traces et avec eux, et j’ose sans eux . . . Mais, ô Dieu! Quelle maladie d’esprit est celle de certains Poëtes et Censeurs de ce temps, sur le langage et sur la Poësie” (1: 932-33). “Marie de Gournay se heurtait à un climat où l’humanisme était synonyme du mauvais goût” (57), Valerie Worth-Stylianou adds in a discussion about Gournay’s theoretical approach to translation. When Gournay refers to Bertaut, Bishop of Sées, and Cardinal du Perron, Archbishop of Sens, both previous translators of Virgil, and when she makes the bold move to juxtapose their translations and her own, she forces the readers, through the material layout of the texts, to see her on an equal plane with male translators.

Gournay also openly defies social limitations in 1626 when, instead of presenting the king praises and adorning her work with his image, she undertakes the war-like gesture of dedicating a revised *Version du second de l’Aeneide*, her “Sac de Troye,” (2: 1605) to Louis XIII. “Or, SIRE, reduicte à la solitude et rangée à l’escart, en mon Siecle, je choisis en ce lieu, suivant le train de mon sort, une voye escartée et sauvage à vous aborder” (2: 1605). Gournay’s warning to the king, to fear, even despise, praise does not

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prohibit her from comparing him to Achilles “et plus magnanime que luy” capable of defeating Hell and all its powers (2: 1606). At the turn of the seventeenth century, for a woman to translate classic authors was not only an infringement on male privilege but lent itself to derision. Gournay knows she is heading into uncharted waters but chooses to attack the crosses of illustrious men with her distaff: “Quelle temerité SIRE, une quenouille attaque une crosse, et la crosse illustre d’un Bertault” (2: 1604).

**Transcending tradition: Egalité des hommes et des femmes and Grief des dames**

*Ombre* also contains Gournay’s two major feminist tracts, *Egalité* and *Grief* which put forth her principles of equality. Recent feminist criticism has contextualized her public disciplining from the perspective that France, as a patriarchal society, sought to silence all women’s claims to equality through minimizing any possible literary, social or political contribution. Gournay’s contemporaries responded to her primarily as a woman seeking to defend her sex in the “Querelle des Femmes,” a divisive, polemical debate where opposing sides argued over whether women were inferior, superior or equal to men. Several books and numerous articles have dealt with different aspects of the reception of Gournay’s feminist writings: Elsa Dorlin, for example, in *L’Evidence de l’égalité des sexes* (2002), Domna Stanton’s “Autogynography: the Case of Marie de

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Gournay’s *Apologie pour celle qui escrit*” (1985), Nancy Frellick’s “(Re)Fashioning Marie De Gournay” (2002), or Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani’s “La Quenouille ou la lyre: Marie de Gournay et la cause des femmes” (1997) to name a few. Yet we need to look briefly at some of the guiding principles in Gournay’s work to uncover more about the nature of equality and education addressed in her autobiographical texts. Indeed, the interest and originality of Gournay in matters of equality and education come from the relationship she maintains between tradition and innovation. She places herself as men’s equal and refers almost exclusively to their works in order to disprove the sophistic arguments they propose to justify women’s inferiority.

Gournay transcends the traditional sexual paradigm of the *Querelle des femmes*: is woman inferior, equal or superior to man; do biological differences justify male domination, or are the differences a basis for a complementarity? She displaces essentialist beliefs in favor of a materialist feminist philosophy which proclaims that any inequality that may exist is the direct result of prejudice and social artifices, maintained by men. Gournay also provoked the *Question Célèbre*: whether girls should learn other things than the science of housewifery, the “power of the dominated,” as Elsa Dorlin comments (12) in her exploration of feminist philosophy of the seventeenth century. The obstacles Gournay faced caused her to reflect on the arguments advanced in favor of one

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sex or the other. One of the great breaks she carries out in *Égalité* is with the traditional male discourse which confines women to a sentimental sphere:

> Si donc les Dames arrivent moins souvent que les hommes, aux degrés de l’excellence; c’est merveille que ce défaut de bonne éducation, et même l’affluence de la mauvaise expresse et professoire, ne face pis, et qu’elle ne les garde d’y pouvoir arriver du tout. S’il le faut prouver: se trouve-t’il plus de différence des hommes à elles, que d’elles à elles-mêmes: selon l’institution qu’elles one receue, selon qu’elles sont eslevées en Ville ou village, ou selon les Nations? Et consequemment, pouquoy leur institution aux affaires et aux lettres à l’égal des hommes, ne rempliroit-elle? (1: 971-72)

Any difference is therefore of a sociological relativity. Education and the place of birth of an individual are the determining factors in his or her intellectual development. As these factors are arbitrary, the superiority of masculine essence is unfounded and illegitimate. This passage also illustrates Gournay’s scathing irony which serves to pinpoint the veracity of her arguments. She is amazed that women “arrive at all” at any degree of excellence with as many shortcomings as they have in proper education. She refuses the “quenouille,” symbol of women’s space, as a complementary image to the “plume,” a male domain, because it leads to a hierarchy of values and tasks. The traditional distinction of roles will prevail; an equitable division and satisfying complementarity will remain illusory as long as society retains essentialist premises.

From the above mentioned texts, Gournay quite clearly intended to work in her own fashion. As we will see later, however, her strong public stances on affairs of the time would hardly go unnoticed by her contemporaries.
AUTobiographical Texts

Marie de Gournay le Jars, Marie de Gournay, Gournay, Damoiselle Marie De Jars, damoiselle Marie De Jars, Gournay de Jars, Marie de Jars Gournay, Marie de Jars damoiselle de Gournay are the various names Gournay uses, sometimes even within the same document, to refer to herself throughout her works, letters and wills. Cases in point, a letter to Justus Lipsius, dated April 25, 1593, is signed ‘Marie de Gournay le Jars’ (2: 1936); whereas another letter to Lipsius on May 2 1596 is signed ‘Marie de Gournay’ (2: 1939). Her will from September 3, 1642 notes that “fut présente ‘Damoiselle Marie de Jars’” but is signed, simply, ‘Gournay’ (2: 1945-51). A later will from December 21, 1644 begins “fut présente ‘demoiselle Marie de Jars’” but is signed ‘Gournay de Jars’ (2: 1952-59). This inconsistency is further complicated elsewhere by her self-representation as the “la fille d’alliance,” the adopted, or covenant, daughter of Montaigne. Indeed, Gournay defines herself through her relations to others; she is even “mother,” to her texts, as she states in her address to her reader in Advise (1: 569).

Gournay’s multiple signatures are also emblematic of the difficulties encountered when taking to task any systematic analysis of her writing or persona, as one soon discovers when delving into her abundant texts which she strove to perfect with a constant flow of revisions over their different editions and her fifty some years of writing. Within this palimpsestic production, Gournay employs a mode of self-inscription, a jeux
du je, as Dezon-Jones\footnote{Elyane Dezon-Jones, “Marie de Gournay: Le je/u/ palimpseste,” \textit{L’Esprit Créateur} \textbf{XXIII}. 2 (Summer 1983): 26-36.} calls it, that does not follow Philippe Lejeune’s generic definition for autobiographies, but rather produces a fragmented autoportrait: “le corpus d’un acte autobiographique original, en triptyque, une sorte d’autoportrait éclaté, qui semble déjouer le piège rimbaudien et affirmer avec force que ‘je n’est pas un autre’, au contraire des apparences” (“Marie de Gournay . . .” 27). No single autobiographical piece by Gournay fulfills all of Lejeune’s more traditional criteria of being a linear tale of a life in prose, with a systematic exploration of one’s personality where author, narrator and principal character coincide.\footnote{Two of Lejeune’s works address these criteria : \textit{L’Autobiographie en France} (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971) and \textit{Le Pacte Autobiographique} (Paris: Seuil, 1975).}

Yet this non-compliance hardly compromises the classification of the texts I examine here as “autobiographical”: \textit{Copie de la vie de la demoiselle de Gournay}, \textit{Pincture de moeurs} and \textit{Apologie de celle qui escrit}. Together they compose a three-part portrait of negotiated identities, where, through different styles, approaches and psychological states, Gournay struggles to stake a claim in the intellectual community of early seventeenth-century France. These autobiographical works rely on parallels she draws between herself and past heroic figures, notably Socrates, Jeanne d’Arc and others who suffered even greater penalties than she from calumny. She likens herself to Montaigne whom she elevates to a demi-god in her 1634 version of \textit{Pincture} (2: 1783 Note 4). Gournay creates these analogies with champions of intellectual and physical strength for the purpose of gaining authority in the literary world. Her exempla are from
both sacred and profane sources, and they provide a fixed, stable structure from which she finds the strength and courage to pursue her own passions.

The numerous textual references to her struggles, and the difficulties she encountered as a woman trying to gain access to the discourses and debates of her era, are the common thread in these three texts, steeped in self-justifications. To understand her works, as Beaulieu and Fournier have commented, “il semble nécessaire de se pencher sur les phénomènes indissociablement liés que sont la réécriture et l’autojustification” (359). The central issue at hand in her defensive posturing is to identify the complex and dialectical powers that work together to shape her persona. These powers are “an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one’s own” (Greenblatt 1). Gournay crafts past figures into her life in attempts to explain herself to the reader and to prove her worthiness. Her life, in turn, emerges with added dimensions and clarity in a dialectical exchange between her own experiences and the Book. As Greenblatt explains (3), the practice of creating an image of oneself during this historical period derived its interest “precisely from the fact that it function[ed] without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life.” Although he does not refer to Gournay, I think that her autobiographical texts illustrate the process of self-fashioning quite clearly, and that her life and her writing become inextricably intertwined as she weaves her persona not with a distaff, but with a pen.

Gournay negotiates her identity as much with herself as she does with the reader. In the process, she fashions herself within a mythic framework which provides her the proper arms to overcome the obstacles and combat the foes that bar her entrance into the literary world. Gournay grasps the meaning and the power of the images, people and histories she inserts in her life and calls upon in her defense. The power of the myth, Sankovitch (3) points out, “is the power to give shape and impact to one’s being through words; to fashion and ‘read’ one’s experience through stories . . . to invent appropriate names and images corresponding to one’s knowledge of oneself. . . .” When Gournay first read the *Essais*, she intuitively understood that the behavior and lifestyle that society expected from her would never sufficiently correspond to her needs and aspirations. She would then take an active role in shaping her experiences – creating herself along the way – to gain the tools necessary to face the “grimaces mondaines” of those who viewed a woman writer as someone to be punished.

Montaigne’s daughter, Lipsius’s sister, Virgin, old maid, lover of anachronistic language, prodigy, monster, the range of denominations surrounding the persona of Gournay demand a confrontation of the different points of view, the debates and the real life experiences of a woman seemingly full of contradictions. A fruitful place to begin to form a better picture of Gournay’s receptions is in fact her autobiographical pieces. For Jauss, the reception of a text, and for this discussion, the reception of Gournay herself, anticipate a shared esthetic experience between author and reader. This experience provides an “intersubjective horizon of expectations” which guides the reader’s understanding through implicit or explicit references and familiar textual characteristics,
creating a certain “emotional disposition” (55-56). These expectations can be maintained, modulated, reoriented or, as oftentimes in the case of Gournay, broken by irony. Gournay asserts herself as subject in three texts: Copie written in 1616 under peculiar circumstances, and not published until 1641, Pincture a character portrait in verse, and Apologie, both published in the first edition of her works, Ombre, in 1626, and in the editions of Advis in 1634 and 1641.

The copy is the original: Copie de la vie de la Demoiselle de Gournay

The prank which led to the first of Gournay’s explicitly autobiographic piece is worth noting. Two courtiers, friends of Malherbe, sent Gournay a letter, supposedly in the name of King James I of England who wished to learn about the muses of the seventeenth century, Montaigne and herself included. This tactic played into Gournay’s self-proclaimed desire for recognition and as she recounts in the explanatory letter introducing Copie, “j’osay croire meriter rang, puis qu’au Royaume des aveugles les borgnes sont Roys” (2: 1860). Six weeks later, the account of her life, Vie de la demoiselle de Gournay, became the source of a practical joke when the courtiers produced a parody which Gournay would later describe as an injurious character assassination (2: 1861). But it was Gournay who manoeuvred to get the last word in the story.

She had kept a copy of the original. We can speculate that it was due to her scrupulousness and desire to rework her own texts over time. Or a case could be made for her fear of misrepresentation. Gournay’s sometimes obsessive preoccupation with
calumny was not unfounded, as will be seen further on, and the idea that a parody of her text was circulating around Paris, “farcie de vanitez ridicules,” could prove devastating in an era where one could lose everything if branded ‘ridiculous’ by public opinion. Gournay demanded that the pranksters, under threat of being charged with defamation, countersign the copy and attest to its authenticity – Copie thus becomes the original. One of them did in fact countersign the portrait, and Gournay decided to publish it towards the end of her career, not only to repair the poor impression left by the parody, which had appeared some twenty-five years earlier, but so that her Vie would encapsulate the three elements of her life which were most important to her: her family, her learning, and Montaigne.

Copie gives the civil status of Gournay in the third person, with a simple direct style: “La Damoselle de Gournay Marie de Jars, nasquit à Paris, de Guillaume de Jars et Jeanne de Hacqueville, aînée de tous leurs enfans” (2: 1861-62). There is a name, a place, a family situation, but no date, which was not particularly uncommon for the time. A general consensus puts her birth at the end of 1565, but finding an exact date is problematic. This text opens with an introduction of her family, starting with the name of the lands where her father had been granted feudal rights in 1568. Had she begun with ‘Marie de Jars’, as biographer Fogel aptly points out (57), she probably would have risked weakening her social position in society. Gournay is fifty when she writes this text,

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88 Dezon-Jones comments on the origin of this piece in Fragments (103) as does Hillman (10), among others.
89 Ilsley (15) gives the date October 6, 1565, a date adopted by many critics after her study; Boase (48) gives the date of September 6, 1565.
some eight years after her brother had sold the Gournay-sur-Aronde property. She had used the pen name ‘Gournay’ throughout her career and in her personal affairs; it is not a question, however, of a literary “auto-engenderment” but of a strong social assertion.

She was all the more pressed to accomplish what she viewed as her family’s destiny due to the strains of the political, social and economic unrest of the time which threatened the privileges of nobility. We find a sense of theatricality in Gournay’s work, and specifically in the autobiographical texts. She meticulously staged herself to reveal a persona with whom she wanted to be identified. This concept of performatance, or literary posturing – a means of shaping and exposing one’s social identity – is developed in a study of the early modern period by David Posner. There was urgency in having one’s identity established, Posner argues (1), for nobility did not exist until it was “confirmed in front of an audience.” This public confirmation became critical during a time when the economic and symbolic status of nobility was undergoing changes. It was this imperative of self-fashioning that prompted both Montaigne and Gournay to adopt the names of their respective estates. Fogel (172-174) describes Gournay’s desperate attempt to buy back the family land in 1609 in her role as eldest, in opposition to her brother, Charles, the eldest male. Her intention was to set up her younger brother, Augustin, as head of house in Gournay. She could not come up with the funds in time, and Augustin died within a year. Being the eldest of six children brought about family responsibilities, namely

managing her siblings’ strained finances after the death of her parents, yet she fully
assumed this burden which would last her entire life.

After a brief account of the noble lineage of her parents, her father’s occupations
and their loss of wealth during periods of war, Gournay writes of her autodidacticism: “à
des heures pour la pluspart desrobées, elle aprot les Lettres seule, et mesmo le Latin sans
Grammaire, et sans ayde, confrontant les Livres de cette Langue Traduicts en François,
contre leurs originaus” (2: 1862). The passage works on different levels. First, she rejects
the traditional role and place of women; she is not occupied with the traditional tasks of a
young girl or the duties of a wife and mother, or with religious duties in a convent.
Secondly, she asserts her occupation is that of learning, an essentially male activity which
explains why she had to steal away time to indulge in her passion. Finally, we see that
Gournay is not without pride in what she presents as a solitary, secret, yet successful
endeavor. Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius himself expressed profound astonishment at
Gournay’s erudition:

Qui es tu, qui m’écries de cette sorte? Une Vierge? À peine en donnes tu
prevue, est-il possible que ces, je ne dirai pas lecture et esprit, mais
sagesse et jugement, se retrouvent en ce sexe en ce siècle ici? Tu m’as
ému, ô Vierge . . . Tu veux t’élever à l’égal de nous autres? Voire te
soulever au-dessus de nous, et fais-le . . . (Fogel 20).91

This pride is well deserved, for it is nothing short of astonishing for a young girl in
sixteenth-century France to teach herself languages. Yet while Gournay’s educational
feat is described in every biographical discussion and in many of the theoretical essays

91 This is a slightly modified version by Fogel of Antoine Brun’s translation from the
concerning her works, the extent to which it portrays an accurate picture is not known. After confronting the dates of different notarized documents with Gournay’s chronology in *Copie*, Fogel (27) determined that Jeanne de Hacqueville, Gournay’s mother, and Gournay with her, were in fact still in Paris when Gournay claims to have been settled in the family property in Picardy. Gournay’s uncle, Louis Le Jars, would have been a prime candidate to have read *Essais* and to have a copy of them either in Paris or in Gournay-sur-Aronde.

In Paris, Gournay’s younger brother, Charles, was a student and in all probability had Latin and Greek grammar books as well as a private tutor. Following this reasoning we can suppose that Gournay’s education was, in part, accomplished in the shadow of her brother. Gournay presents herself as strong-willed, even combative, in her stance to educate herself against her mother’s wishes:

> Et fit son estude ainsi, tant par l’aversion que sa mere apportoit en telles choses, que parce que cette authorité maternelle l’emmena soudain après le trespas du père en Picardie, à Gournay, lieu reculé des commoditez d’apprendre les Sciences par enseignement, ny par conference (2: 1862).

Despite her educational shortcomings, which she deplores, she happened upon a copy of *Essais*, “par hazard,” and was so overwhelmed by the originality and quality of Montaigne’s writing that from that point on in her life she desired nothing more than to know and communicate with him:

> . . . bien qu’ils [les *Essais*] fussent nouveaux et sans nulle reputation encore; qui peust guider son jugement; elle les mit non seulement à leur juste prix, traict fort difficile à faire en tel aage, et en un Siecle si peu suspect de porter de tels fruicts mais elle commença de desirer la connaissance, communication et bienveillance de leur Autheur, plus que toutes les chose au monde. (2: 1863)
Gournay is not only participating in an act of self-fashioning, but also in the act of creating Montaigne who had not yet achieved the literary reknown he would later. As Olivier Millet’s\textsuperscript{92} study of Montaigne reveals, his early reception was largely positive but criticisms of the relatively unknown author – either written or oral, in the form of conversations in literary circles – must have existed. The origins of the commentaries that triggered the acerbic response from Gournay in 1595, though, remain “mysterious” (10). The description of her first evaluation of Montaigne’s work is a construction which focuses the reader’s attention on Gournay’s innate faculty for intellectual endeavors. It is a demonstration of her clairvoyance, literary acumen and her affiliation with noble wise men, the sages, a comparison she fully develops in another autobiographic piece, Apologie. Self-fashioning is the power to form perceptions, according to Greenblatt, those of oneself and of others. We see that the logic of self-fashioning is clearly at work in Copie. Gournay imposes a shape on herself – a young, combative, astute autodidact – and in turn, this shape functions to control, at least in part, the identity of Montaigne who is constructed in the mold of an ancient philosopher. In establishing her stature through Montaigne, Gournay simultaneously promotes Montaigne.

Interestingly, in the above passage Gournay herself reformulates part of the tribute Montaigne had paid her in Essais:

\begin{quote}
J’ay pris plaisir à publier en plusieurs lieux l’esperance que j’ay de Marie de Gournay le Jars, ma fille d’alliance, et certes aymée de moy beaucoup plus que paternellement, et enveloppée en ma retraitte et
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{92} Olivier Millet, \textit{La Première réception des Essais de Montaigne (1560-1640)} (Genève : Slaktine Reprints, 1995).
solitude, comme l’une des meilleures parties de mon propre estre. Je ne
regarde plus qu’elle au monde. Si l’adolescence peut donner presage, cette
ame sera quelque jour capable des plus belles choses, et entre autres de la
perfection de cette trêssaincte amitié où nous ne lisons point que son sexe
ait peu monter encore. La sincérité et la solidité de ses meurs y sont desjà
bastantes, son affection vers moy, plus que sur-abondante, et telle en
somme, qu’il n’y a rien à souhaiter, sinon que l’apprehension qu’elle a de
ma fin, par les cinquante et cinq ans auxquels elle m’a rencontré, la
travaillast moins cruellement. Le jugement qu’elle fit des premiers Essays,
et femme, et en ce siècle, et si jeune, et seule en son quartier, et la
vehemence fameuse dont elle m’ayma et me desira long temps sur la seule
estime qu’elle en print de moy, avant m’ avoir veu, c’est un accident de
très digne consideration. (645; bk. 2, ch. 17)

The meeting with Montaigne and subsequent discussions and revisions of Essais proved
to be the single most important event in Gournay’s adult life. In fact the details of this
meeting, Montaigne’s stay at Gournay-sur-Aronde, and her editorial work, constitute the
majority of the text, bearing witness to the preponderant importance of her father by
adoption.

During her first encounter with Essais, Gournay had felt pierced through by some
visionary power they emanated on her: “On estoit prest à me donner de l’hellebore, lors
que comme ils me furent fortuitement mis en main au sortir de l’enfance, ils me
transsisoient d’admiration . . .” (1: 280 Note 10). Her mother, not a proponent of formal
education for girls, wanted to give her a sedative to calm her obsession with the relatively
unknown work. As Fogel asserts, it would be naïve to think that a young girl of
Gournay’s age was really searching for wisdom in her library: “ce serait nier la
complexité de l’écriture de la Préface entre argumentation rigide et confidences
incontrôlées” (31). Indeed, she does in fact borrow many images and themes from Essais,
one of which is the association of “natural” and “noble,” a theme that is present in Copie.
The persona that Gournay is (re)creating came of age without the artifices of formal education, in a “natural” setting and it is within this context she wishes to be viewed. Gournay’s *Copie* then, should not be examined as a chronological account of her psychological and intellectual evolution, but as a retrospective portrait, a social image she self-fashions, crafted through literary performance.

Of particular relevance to the style and content of Gournay’s *Copie*, is Posner’s discussion of Montaigne’s “mask of *franchise*” (49-63). His analysis of two anecdotes in “De la phisionomie” (bk. 3, ch. 12) reveals how dimensions of Montaigne’s rhetoric of openness serve, Posner argues, to identify and shape nobility in early modern literature. First, there is a performance of what is “natural,” the ability to persuade the reader that there is no theatricality in the staging of oneself. We see this tactic in Gournay’s use of the third-person to speak of herself in *Copie*. She separates herself from the actions she is describing to maintain what Posner calls “critical distance” (48). This separation between author and role is necessary to create the facade of a more trustworthy, objective account of her life. She becomes a faithful observer and transcriber of her life rather than a performer. There is also an air of transparency – a fundamental quality of nobility for Montaigne – in *Copie* which arguably has the simplest style of any of Gournay’s writings. Its opening line, “La Damoiselle de Gournay Marie de Jars, nasquit à Paris, de Guillaume de Jars et Jeanne de Hacqueville, aînée de tous leurs enfans,” establishes a tone of naïveté and sets a stage for the audience to anticipate a factual depiction.

Related to performance of the natural is Gournay’s discursive style in the text. Montaigne describes his ideal discourse as “un parler simple et naïf . . .” (171; bk. 1, ch.
which, as we have seen, is present in *Copie*. This style is in opposition to the affected flattery and emptiness of courtiers who twist their words to ingratiate themselves with their interlocutors. Posner explains (33) how discourse is associated with social identity in the *Essais* to the extent that the “franc parler of Montaigne’s hypothetical nobleman defines a class . . . the language of the true nobleman is perfectly transparent to those not blinded by the smokescreen of courtly discourse. . . .” Gournay adopts this open, uncomplicated discourse indicative of Montaigne’s characterization of true noblemen. She then carefully establishes her parents’ noble lineages. Her father belonged to the noblesse d’épée and although he had left his family lands, his nobility was validated by a series of royal appointments. We learn that both families were catholic and allied with other good and honorable families. The implicit reasoning is that her own nobility cannot be denied and that she is due the respect and honors of her class. Gournay seeks the same public validation from her contemporaries that her parents had benefited from among their peers.

Gournay tempers the profound sadness – the “déplaisir extrême” that she experienced after receiving the false news of Montaigne’s death – with an abrupt change of tone, “Soudain, ayant un contraire advis, suivy de l’heureuse arrivée de luy-mesme à Paris . . . ” (2: 1863). Her use of “suddenly” is unusual in her discourse and it appears as a rather clumsy interjection, seperating her dashed dreams from their unexpected realization, allowing the reader to imagine a young author who lacks the retrospection and introspection of a more mature writer. The note she sends Montaigne when she discovers that he is in Paris is quickly brushed over when she tells her audience that it
only expressed her estime for him and his writings. Whatever its contents, it provoked a favorable reaction.

Il la vint voir et remercier dès le lendemain, lui présentant l’affection et l’alliance de père à fille : ce qu’elle reçut avec d’autant plus d’aplaisissement, de ce qu’elle admira la sympathie fatale du Genie de lui et d’elle : s’estant promis en son cœur une telle alliance de lui depuis la premiere inspection de son Livre : et cela sur la proportion de leurs aages, et l’intention de leurs ames et de leurs mœurs. (2: 1863)

Gournay suggests that their meeting had been predestined, “la sympathie fatale,” something she had forseen and willed. Her intellectual yearnings and happiness in meeting Montaigne take on the coloring of a moment of adolescent passion. When she wrote this text in 1616, Gournay had long since reached intellectual maturity. Yet her conscious fashioning produces a report seemingly without artifice and as if the events and her emotions were fresh. She stages herself and the early part of her life to gain the trust and good faith of the audience, hoping to convince them of the veracity of Copie. Paradoxically, it is precisely Gournay’s performance that aims to underscore the unaffectedness and authenticity of her story.

Another dimension of the social mask in Copie, to parallel Posner’s description of the Essais (53), is Gournay’s “focused performance.” That is to say, her revelations have precise, underlying objectives. Gournay believed that she figured among the ranks of muses. The request to include her autobiography was received as a factual demand. When

93 It should be noted that even though Gournay is careful to say the contrary, her strong will, sense of destiny and her admitted enthrallment with Montaigne – taken together with his sudden arrival at her house – leads one to the conjecture that her note possibly included an invitation.
she first wrote her *Vie*, as intended for the King of England, Gournay believed that she figured among the muses and therefore her story deserved to be told – “j’osay croire meriter ce rang” (2: 1860). Behind this mask of openness lies a “focus,” or hidden agenda – her personal aspirations – which are more pertinent in creating her social identity. Gournay leaves the impression that intellectual occupations were a calling. No matter what her mother thought, no matter where she lived, despite all obstacles of fate – the “tres-penibles incommoditez et difficultez, qui l’ont toujours depuis fort divertie” (2: 1863) – she was endowed with a natural gift.

Her ability is tested when she happens upon a copy of the *Essais* whose significance she is capable of evaluating, Gournay explains, despite their newness, her inexperience and the unfavorable era in which they are produced. But it was not any personal ambition that pushed her to pursue her path. Instead, it was the *Essais* that uncovered her true nature, her inherent literary filiation and her intellectual calling as a woman of letters. Substantiating her filiation with other distinguished authors was a career strategy, all the more so in this case where Gournay sought consecration from a king who could offer public, literary recognition and possibly financial support. There was even greater symbolic value in the sponsorship of *Copie* due to its supposed originator. The request allegedly came from the King, as opposed to being a sollication on the part of Gournay. Added to the prestige of receiving a royal request, there was the subject matter – the author herself; she was asked to produce an autobiographical piece, not a laudatory tribute to some aspect of the King’s life. As Alain Viala has noted (82) in his discussion of the emergence of state sponsorship in the seventeenth century, “être
ainsi gratifié valait un brevet de dignité littéraire” and recuperating some literary dignity following the publication of *La Defence des Peres Jesuites* (1610) most certainly would have figured among her objectives in the writing of *Copie*.

As Gournay announces near the end of *Copie*, she hopes to have published another partial portrait, in the form of an upcoming poem, undoubtedly “Pincture de moeurs,” which figures in “Bouquet de Pinde” in 1626. The last lines of *Copie* include a short description of her physical characteristics, perhaps in an attempt to rectify the claims leveled against her by detractors who looked to denigrate her work by parody and mockery of her physical appearance: “Elle est née la taille mediocre et bien faicte, le teint clair brun, le poil castain, le visage rond et qui ne se peut appeller ny beau ny laid” (2: 1864). Again, this passage is modeled on one of Montaigne’s *Essais* (2: 17, 623 A) in which he describes himself in very similar terms: “d’une taille un peu au dessous de la moyenne.” Social conventions of the time had polite society on a quest for norms and Montaigne correlates his physical description with his personality: “Mes conditions corporelles sont en somme trèsbien accordantes à celles de l’ame” (2: 17, 625 A). In Gournay’s description of herself, she creates the image of someone who is unpresumptuous and phlegmatic, an image which does not seem to account for her many direct appeals to prominent figures and the harsh tone she adopts when chatising courtiers.
and grammarians. As Dezon-Jones has noted, the lithographs and engravings printed in Gournay’s own time show that she did in fact give a quite accurate picture of herself.\footnote{It is left to conjecture then as to why a portrait of Anna of Austria figures as the cover art in Hillman and Quesnel’s \textit{Marie le Jars de Gournay} (2002). \textit{Égalité des hommes et des femmes} was dedicated to her but their choice remains curious for a book on Gournay.}

She asks the reader to judge her by the ample writings she is soon to publish and not by those written during her youth, obviously aware of how their reception had already hurt her reputation. She does not reject her early texts but recognizes her inexperience and looks to refine and polish her writings. In other terms, Gournay is looking to strengthen the intersubjective horizon of expectations with her readers by unwearily and painstakingly editing her texts, without changing the arguments and beliefs she puts forth. She is painfully aware of the criticisms against her but yearns for recognition from the literary world at large; her editorial work is not an attempt to please the public or to correspond to her contemporaries’ literary estheticism, but to clarify her thoughts and convictions. In short, Gournay desires recognition, yet disdains the very idea of popularity. \textit{Copie} was not included in Gournay’s collected works until the last edition of \textit{Advis} in 1641 when she placed it as the final text, bearing out the significant importance she must have seen in it shortly before she died. The judgment she calls for takes on much greater proportions than it had in 1616: “Pour son esprit et son jugement, ses Escrits les tesmoigneront plus justement que les nostres” (2: 1864). She is no longer addressing an individual – the king – but all future generations of readers who will evaluate her more fairly. Gournay contends (2: 1861) in her introductory letter that she
was following the advice of friends in publishing *Copie*, a *topos* she exploits in many of her texts and a common practice of modesty and validation. Her version would help erase the bad impressions left by the farce and, Gournay informs the reader, her friends are “persuaded” that after her death others could enjoy reading it. I advance that it is her desire to be read, as she originally staged herself, that induced her to include this piece as a conclusion to her life’s work and the opening letter functions as a mask of *franchise* to veil her focus. Her initial belief that she deserved the rank of muse had endured.

**Virtue and vices: *Pincture de moeurs***

The second part of her autoportrait takes up, in 1596, where *Copie* had left off. It provides the reader with another literary form Gournay worked with, poetry. Written in the first person and in a candid style, the alexandrines of “Pincture” are essentially a catalog of her shortcomings and qualities which the reader can then either “approuver ou casser” (2: 1783). Gournay’s decision to write in verse was relevant. She shows that not only she can write on a broad range of topics – political and social events, linguistics and literary theory, translation and education – she can write in different forms – fiction, essays, prose and verse. It was vital for her to be seen as woman of letters, and, as such, she used her entire range of intellectual abilities to prove her worth. But much of the thematic content that is laid out in *Pincture* is found elsewhere in Gournay’s work, *Apologie*, for example, or “Des Grimaces mondaines.” Her numerous displays of contempt of the “vulgaire” and “commun” are found in all of her principal texts, from *Bien-venue* to *Advis*. 
When Gournay refused ideologies of class and gender, she was choosing to live, not as she was expected, but as she was led by her own curiosity and inclinations. Such was also the case with her practice of alchemy. *Pincture* is offered to Jean d’Espagnet (1564- ca. 1637), a court lawyer who became President of the Parliament of Bordeaux in 1601, and with whom Gournay journeyed from Paris to Bordeaux following Montaigne’s death. Her interest in alchemy was possibly sparked during this two-week trip as d’Espagnet wrote alchemistic treatises which he published anonymously. His identity as the author of *Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae* (Handbook of Recovered Science) (1625) and *Arcanum Hermeticae Philosophiae Opus* (Secret Work of Hermetic Philosophy) (1623) was discovered in 1648. In Andrea Aromatico’s terms, the final aim of alchemy is “the reconciliation of all dualities and the unitary development of all knowledge” (37), and to find the key to the transmutation of elements, one must be virtuous and have a stalwart resolve. Gournay did show proof of an iron will but it would not lead her to the results she desired.

There is a seeming contradiction between, on one hand, Gournay justifying the money she spent on alchemical experiments and, on the other hand, her swearing she spent little on anything, both of which run counter current to the ambient social practices. “Je n’aime pas l’argent que pour le seul besoin” is listed as one of her qualities (2: 1785), and she justifies her experiments in *Pincture*, and again at great length in *Apologie*. In fact it is Gournay’s defense of her expenditures and actions that foregrounds the

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seventeenth-century reader’s “horizon of expectations.” By contextualizing her activities “she also calls attention to the fact that she has departed radically from the way women of her class were expected to live . . . [It] also reveals the extent to which she was an iconoclast: earning money by writing, and neglecting what a woman should never neglect – her personal appearance” (Cholakian 412). The practice of alchemy was not unusual in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. “Pray, read, reread, work, and you shall find,” Ora, lege, relege, labora, et invenis, was a well known adage for alchemists, as Andrea Aromatico explains (56). Women, however, were warned to stay away from the study because of their tendency to fall into excesses, “les suites folles.” But the practice of alchemy was well tolerated, even encouraged, in young men who could control themselves better than young women. As Arnould (2: 1786 Note A) states, “une telle tolerance pour les superstitions juveniles paraît une idée commune.” Thomas Willard, in his introduction to d’Espagnet’s *The Summary of Physics Restored,* advances that Gournay’s attitude on alchemy “becomes a metaphor for her approach to life itself generally, as she chooses between secrecy and candor, selfishness and liberality” (16). It is true that Gournay approached life by networking – cultivating her relations with those who could help in her own transformation into the literary field, and to whom she would offer faithful friendship – in an ideal relationship that combined personal and career strategies.

Gournay and d’Espagnet shared common interests in alchemy and, above all, in Montaigne. As she states in her opening line of *Pincture*, d’Espagnet was “façonné sur le Siecle plus sage” (2: 1783). He was from an older generation, Montaigne’s and her parents’, upon which she bases her mythic golden age. She recounts how they met twenty years before: “Nostre abord commença quand je fus à Montaigne; / Voir un mort au cercueil, sa fille et sa campagne” (2: 1783). The second line of this couplet was changed in the 1634 edition to read “Voir un mort Demy dieu, sa fille et sa campagne” (Note 4) but then changed back to the original version in 1641. As Sankovitch argues (85), the reference to a de migod “[emphasizes] the mythifying tendency of this piece,” especially if put in relation with the poetry to Montaigne and his family in *Promenoir* in 1594. Indeed, when Gournay gives praise, it is often in mythifying terms. She uses the term “Demi-Dieux” in a poem written in honor of her parents in 1594, also referring to them as “Les Heros d’Apollon” (2: 1839-40). “Bouquet poétique” which follows *Promenoir*, and then becomes “Bouquet de Pinde” in 1626, contains numerous examples of that type.

A sonnet from “Bouquet” – Michel Seigneur de Montaigne, sur ses *Essais* – speaks of an inscription Gournay would like to engrave on his book: “Permets qu’en lettre d’or sur leur carte immortelle / J’engrave icy ce Vers qui s’éternise en elle: / ‘Montaigne escrit cecy, Jupiter l’a dicté’” (2: 1764 Note 9). After the 1599 edition, the last line become “Montaigne escrit ce Livre, Apollon l’a conceu.” All the while remaining in the realm of mythic figures, Gournay accords Montaigne greater powers in the second version. Jupiter, the roman name for Zeus, the supreme god of the Olympians, no longer “dictates” the *Essais*. Instead, Montaigne writes them himself, having received
poetic inspiration from Apollo, one of Gournay’s favorite gods who appears over twenty-five times in her works. This modification parallels Gournay’s relationship with Montaigne and the “Book.” While at Gournay-sur-Aronde, Montaigne dictated to her, and it was only after his death that she published her work, inspired amply from Montaigne’s writings to conceive of her own power to write.

In her first comments on her vices, Gournay portrays herself as hot-headed and unforgiving of insults. While she is impatient and given to anger, these “vices” are nothing compared to the wrath, sting and forceful assaults to which she has been subjected. This theme comes up at different points in the poem: “L’effort de mon malheur mon courage ne brise. / Mon courroux bien qu’ardent ma raison ne maistrise . . .” (2: 1786). Later she writes: “L’injure plus qu’à nul à mon coeur est amere; / J’aymerois mieux pourtant la souffrir que la faire” (2: 1787). Pincture is a testament to the pain and distress she suffered from her detractors. She advances that passion and reason carry equal weight in her life but in transferring this same “conscience” to others she sets herself up to be mistreated. She makes allusion again to being unforgiving of practical jokes and mockery when she states that she cannot be tricked, only deceived, such is the depth of her anguish. Attacking to better defend is one of Gournay’s tactics when discussing her convictions or unveiling injustices. She may get carried away in her arguments but they are founded on Reason: “. . . il advient que j’espouse/ La Raison et ses droits d’une humeur trop jalouse: / Toute noble qu’elle est cedons parfois aux foux/ Et qui ne veut heurler laisse heurler les loups” (2: 1784).
Gournay justifies her sometimes passionate take on the world around her by pushing reason to irony, just as she had done in publishing Copie. When saying that if she did not speak out, the wolves (“les loups”) would howl, she shows the power of her convictions and her belief that it was her right, even her duty, to speak out. Before laying out her virtues, Gournay underlines the need for balance and for a grounded perception of oneself: “Pour m’estimer un peu je ne merite blasme, / D’un appast si friend chaqu’un flatte son ame: / J’en crains les rieurs si je me prise à pointct: / Qui ne void ses Vertus son Vice il ne void point” (2: 1785). She does not deserve to be blamed for her self-esteem, on the contrary; she cannot claim to have an honest appreciation of herself, she reasons, by only addressing her faults. In her 1626 essay, “Des vertus vicieuses”, she speaks at some length on virtue and the difficulty of recognizing it: “Il nous chante, que la Vertu n’a gueres de cours en ce Siecle. Je me plains de ce qu’elle en a beaucoup moins qu’il ne pense, et de ce que par faute de la cognoistre, et discerner seulement” (1: 992). Further on in “Des vertus,” she elaborates on the idea that virtue and vice must necessarily coexist: “Si un homme qui est vertueux à cette condition n’avait point de vices, il n’auroit point de vertus” (1: 994). This notion of balance, of juste milieu, echoes her physical self-description in Copie, “of average height, neither beautiful, nor ugly.”

This concept also comes out in Apologie, in 1626, where she chastises courtiers for their inability to distinguish good behavior from bad; they cannot put their actions “à juste prix” (2: 1376 Note 4). In the 1641 version, Gournay edits the passage to read “l’incapacité des Peuples à peser en une juste balance, les bonnes ou les mauvaises actions” (2: 1376). A scale, a blind justice that can evaluate worth, honesty and virtue,
independently of the “faveurs de la Fortune,” is an image Gournay refines in her autobiographical pieces, and a vision developed in direct opposition to “les rieurs” who are incapable of judging her based on the merit of her writing. Instead, her detractors condemn her on different levels: her relative poverty, largely treated in Apologie, and her self-promotion at a period where discretion, subterfuge, *le paraître* are valued in women. The fact that Gournay is a woman, taking a stance with a pen, adds more fuel for their derision, leading Patricia Cholokian to comment, “Of course, it was unheard-of for a single woman to live alone, let alone support herself by writing” (414). The imagery is evocative of a trial where Gournay feels *misjudged*. Her work is mocked and she is accused of wrong doings in her personal life. She appeals her case to a higher court in a defensive posturing that will reach its apex in *Apologie*.

Gournay’s following verses express her outrage at the unfounded perception that she is now without means because she did not manage her family’s estate properly:

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Je ne m’accuse pas du deffaut de mesnage,
De ce reproche en vain le Vulgaire m’outrage:
Pour me voir sans moyens, sans mesnage on me croid:
J’en aurois à plain fond quand mon bien le voudroit.
Ah que le nom du pauvre aisément on opprime!
Mon bien cour et brouillé je n’ay deu conserver,
Puis que de la misere il n’eust peu me sauver. (2: 1785)
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Gournay defends her financial management and mourns the loss of her family’s property. The staunch defense she makes in these matters will take on considerable length in *Apologie*. Her relative poverty is difficult to evaluate but Fogel points out that she had five different addresses in ten years and that her movement across Paris is easy to trace because Gournay was constantly chasing after money: “il est semé de cessions des rentes
publiques héritées et d’emprunts: douze operations visibles en dix ans, d’autres peut-être” (152). Gournay justifies her potentially costly dabbling in alchemy by saying it was limited, without “ses suites folles” (2: 1786), and that she Gournay cheated no one and spent little. This last point is hardly a virtue for a person of noble birth at her time, where the code of social conduct demanded extravagant expenses. Yet she speaks of fleeing vain luxury and her promptness in paying her debts: “Aux affaires bandée et de loin prevoyante. / Je ne suis nonchalante à payer mon devoir” (2: 1787). Despite her awareness of the norms of “honnetes gens,” Gournay, true to her beliefs, adopts a marginal, even alienating position: “Le fast j’envoye aux Cours et l’assigne aux Escoles. /…/ Tromper, dépenser gros, croire l’Art sans doubter . . . ” (2: 1786).

Gournay is proud of her capacity to see her own faults, the desire for recognition among them, and of her good faith to admit them in public. To respond to Willard’s supposition on Gournay’s approach to life, let us say that she chose candor and liberality. For her, this public confession will perhaps, as according to the French expression, “une faute avouée est à moitié pardonnée,” grant her some clemency. Her sense of fairness and equality prevent her from falling into the recklessness of substituting truth with probability, “pour vray le vray semblable” (2: 1785). The “vray semblable” references the parodies of her, such as Copie, but also suggests the pomp of the court, which she deemed as “ridicule et sifflable” (2: 1785). Had her family fortune not been compromised by the unforeseen death of her father and civil conflicts, Gournay may not have been so severe towards “La grimace de Cour et son fard” whose airs and graces she hated (2: 1787). Perhaps there is a hint of jealousy in her bitterness even though she claims the
contrary: “Je ne seme discord. Je ne couve l’envie” (2: 1787). But it is more likely that
the origin of the acrimony she displays lies in the calumnies she was forced to refute in
order to stand among men in the Republic of Letters.

Gournay’s strategy of argumentation is made clear when she prompts the reader
to believe that her manipulation of texts and references are voluntary and not due to her
ignorance or poor interpretation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ou si pour mon besoin la verité j’altère,} \\
\text{C’est sur le coup précis d’une importante affaire:} \\
\text{Sans interest d’autrui, sans me prester du vent,} \\
\text{Sans affirmer encore, et certes peu souvent.} \\
\text{Puis qu’on peut rarement deguiser le mensonge,} \\
\text{Dans son bourbier honteux le prudent ne se plonge. (2: 1786-87)}
\end{align*}
\]

The first two lines of this passage plainly show her awareness of her own fashioning
techniques. Gournay possessed an acute need, bordering on obsession, to construct her
own portrayal for posterity. Although she is most likely referring to one specific incident,
the process through which she defines herself in the autobiographical pieces remains the
same – she alters the truth for a greater cause that she has deemed important. According
to Paul Bonnefon98 and Marjorie Ilsley,99 Gournay pretended to have found a revision of
Ronsard’s “Harangue du duc de Guise.” Ronsard’s “revision” was in fact a false copy
that she had rewritten herself to rejuvenate its language so that it would better correspond
to the linguistic tastes of the time. Gournay abandoned this project when her ruse was

de la France*, 3 (1896): 70-89.
99 Marjorie Ilsley, “Marie de Gournay's Revision of Ronsard's ‘Harangue du Duc de
?28195212%2967%3A7%3C1054%3AMDGROR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-I>.
discovered but only after presenting one completed poem to Louis XIII in 1624. It is my contention that if Gournay had the audacity to manipulate such an established poet as Ronsard for the sake of future generations, she most certainly would not be above manufacturing or changing experiences from her own life. Despite this episode, honesty is a strong theme throughout her work. Her honesty does not come from meticulous detail to facts but is a moral quality: “Je suis fort veritable et d’une entiere foy” (2: 1786). Her personal interests do not deform what she sees: “Je voy le vice aussi qui difforme l’amie: / Et connoy la vertu qui dore l’ennemy” (2: 1787). One verse however is perplexing: “Je ne condamne aucun suyvant la voix publique” (2: 1788). This contradicts an assertion made in the 1595 preface: “Je veux un mal si horrible à cette imperfection qui me blesse tant, qu’il faut que je l’injurie en public”. She did in fact take out this passage in the future editions of *Essais* but still rebuked “les froids estimateurs” of Montaigne, and in the 1635 preface, she called to task Baudier, Charron, Monluc and de La Noue in no uncertain terms, refuting their different criticisms of the philosopher.

Since Gournay considers the analyses of Montaigne’s critics tenuous, if not totally unfounded, it is acceptable to condemn them, as the 1626 essay “Si la vengeance est licite?” suggests: “Non seulement elle est permettable, mais en quelque sorte meritoire: puis que de deux maux il faut élíre le moindre, et que quand la vengeance seroit injuste en soy…il y a plus de mal à l’impunité, et presque authorization du meschant.” (1: 759). Revenge, for Gournay, is just and necessary even though she foresees different arguments against it, one of which being the possibility of abuse. She does not condone duels, whose interdiction by royal law she in fact commends, but she supports a punishment “dispensée
sur les occasions et les circonstances . . . Bien entendu pourtant, que ce n’est que pour les Offences atroces ou pesantes” (1: 751-52). This essay highlights another focus or motive in Gournay’s texts – writing as vengeance – which rears up in a variety of essays such as Égalité, “Des Sottes Finesses,” or again in “Deffence de la Poesie.”

A last major point of interest in “Pincture” is Gournay’s adhesion to her theses on equality and education. As we saw above, Gournay questions the oppression of those without means. In this case, “le pauvre” refers to herself but she also plants the seed of an equality that extends beyond the poor of noble birth: “La Vertu sans les biens j’honore où je la voy” and further on, “Les foibles je respecte à l’égal des puissans” (2: 1787). Her fairness and candor are traits she was born with, but “l’ordre,” she earned over time by reading: “L’équité, la candeur, je les tiens de Nature: / L’ordre je l’ay gaigné par temps et par lecture” (2: 1788). As expected her “reading” refers most strongly to the Essais, the turning point in her intellectual life. Gournay is influenced by humanist ideas: education, the realization of oneself, the transmission of knowledge, all figure among the themes in her writings. It is an individual’s education that is the determining factor in intellectual development, not one’s wealth or sex.

**Triple Bind: Apologie pour celle qui escrit**

*Apologie* has been a recent subject of inquiry with different conclusions: “an emblematic discourse on the problematic of the female subject in our symbolic order” (Stanton 21), a “conflicted imitation” of Montaigne’s “De l’Amitié” (Cholokian 408), “un genre hybride, sorte d’essai au feminin” that takes up the “sot projet de se peindre
soi-même” (Dezon-Jones “Le je/u” 28), even “an act of self-immolation” (Hillman 109). These are all fruitful lines of inquest today. My primary intention here, though, is to examine how Gournay presents her own persona, how the text describes her states of mind, experiences of the world, and how she views her relationship with posterity. Her defensive posturing in Apologie erects itself against the triple bind she fought: her sex, relative poverty and her desire for status in the sacred hall of erudition. Gournay was not alone in her use of the apologetic mode of writing to fend off possible criticisms. Other publications in early modern France witness lengthy justifications for their undertaking. Yet as Broomhall emphasizes (81), while self-doubt was not restricted to female authors, the “explanation of insufficiency almost without exception rested upon their gender, rather than other factors.” Insufficiency, though, is not often invoked by Gournay, and when it is, she uses it as an excuse for her supposed poor French, Latin, or manners, not for the act of writing itself. Additionally, in the two instances discussed below, she blames her provincial origins for her insufficiencies, when in fact she was Parisian. Gournay’s “insufficiencies” are, in reality, a strategy to veil the audicity of her actions and the boldness of her positions. In these cases, she emerges as active participant in her own fashioning, manipulating her origins to better suit the higher social status of her interlocutors.

Plato’s monumental defense of Socrates, Apology, is evoked in three of Gournay’s works: the 1595 preface to the Essais, Égalité des hommes et des femmes, and

100 Susan Broomhall, Women and the Book Trade in Sixteenth-Century France (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).
her own *Apologie*. In each case, the use of Plato’s *Apology* underscores her concept of *suffisance*, capacity or wisdom, central to her non-essentialist beliefs. For Olivier Millet, Gournay’s notion of wisdom is “de nature aristocratique, réservée qu’elle est à une élite d’âmes, mais une élite qui ignore les barrières de la condition et de la profession, de l’âge ou du sexe, ce qui est important pour le féminisme de Gournay” (84). 101 These references to Plato function as acts of self-empowerment for Gournay as she fashions herself within mythic structures to gain access to, and to justify her presence in, the literary world. From the beginning of her professional career with the preface to Montaigne’s *Essais*, she bemoans the incapacity of her contemporaries, *le vulgaire*, to see this work for its true worth. She compares Montaigne, and by extension herself, to Plato when stating that if Plato’s *Apology* appeared without the author’s name, “il [le vulgaire] en fera des farces” (1: 276). As early as 1595, Gournay’s distaste and mistrust of common opinion take on an ominous quality, foreshadowing her own future mystification.

Plato is conjured up again in *Égalité*, to describe an ideal world of elites where Socrates would reign: “Combien aussi ce Roy des Sages se chatouille-t’il d’espoir, d’entretenir en l’autre Monde la suffisance des grands hommes et des grandes femmes que les Siecles ont portez: et quelles delices se promet-il de cet exercice, en la divine *Apologie* par laquelle son grand Disciple nous rapporte ses derniers discours?” (1: 970). Finally, *Apologie* (2: 1416-17) echoes her own verse “Pour m’estimer un peu je ne merite

blasme” from *Pincture*: “Les sages pardonnent en l’oppression, un mot favorable de soy-
mesme . . . Socrates d’autre part, a la bouche pleine de ses louanges propres et des plus
hautes, aux deux *Apologies*, particulierement en celle de Xenophon.”\(^{102}\) Indeed, in
Xenophon’s account of Socrates’ trial (for introducing *daimonion* his “divine signs” or
“voices”\(^{103}\) into the city of Athens), Socrates believed death was preferable to submitting
to the opinion of the Athenian jury:

> I will not eagerly promote these thing; but as many noble things as I
believe to have obtained both from gods and from human beings, and the
opinion which I have of myself—if by displaying these things I vex the
jurors, then I will choose to die rather than to live longer by slavishly
begging to gain a much worse life instead of death. (11)

With Socrates as her model, Gournay’s favorable opinion of herself is justified and
publicly justifiable, even if it leads to her own disciplining. In an interesting parallel,
Jeanne d’Arc, another of Gournay’s models, discussed below, will also be disciplined for
her “voices.”

As with Plato’s *Apology*, Gournay’s own *Apologie*, clearly takes the meaning of
“defense,” or as defined by Furetière, “en termes de Palais, se dit des premieres écritures
qu'on fournit en un procés contre un demandeur . . . En matiere criminelle, un accusé
pour toutes écritures donne des deffenses par attenuation.” According to Hillman (107),
Gournay invokes Plato “self-consciously and rather grandiosely” as she defends herself
“like the persecuted Greek philosopher.” This third fold of Gournay’s self-portrait is the

\(^{102}\) Both Plato and Xenophon wrote an *Apology of Socrates*. See Arnould (2: 1417 Note B).

\(^{103}\) Robert Bartlett ed., *Xenophon’s The Shorter Socratic Writings: Apology of Socrates to
the Jury, Oeconomicus, and Symposium* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), gives the
translation of *daimonion* and further references (10).
largest and most revealing. It is in the form of a letter to an “honorable prelate,” possibly a cousin, so that he may arm himself with details of her life against the malicious and frivolous attacks, “ces mal-heureux vents du babil,” that have followed her throughout her life (2: 1376).104

Apologie is a two-part text focusing first on false friendships and those who have deceived her and then moves on to the evils of slander and mockery. As in Égalité and other theoretical essays, her style of writing is in the humanist tradition: a sprawling dialectical display of authoritative arguments and rhetorical processes supported by the Scriptures and other ancient and modern texts, combined with reflections on the self. The defense of her reputation begins with Solomon:

Qui peut blamer ma hayne de la calomnie, si Salomon écrit; Qu’elle seiche les os, trouble le Sage, et brise la constance de son ame? Et si le Philosophe appelle la honte: “le plus grief des maux externes”? L’horreur de ce monstre s’estend jusques aux animaux irraisonnables, tant elle est naturelle, dont on pourroit alleguer plusieurs exemples: . . . l’hermine . . . Arrive de là, que Platon conseille à ses Citoyens, de ne mespriser pas la reputation. Et le bon vieillard Elesar, venerable Sacrificateur Juif, l’estima tant; que pour n’avoir pas le bruit non plus que l’effect, d’avoir mangé de la chair de porc, il souffrit les plus extremes tourmens et puis le dernier supplice, sous ce bourreau d’Antiochus Epiphanès. (2: 1378)

Gournay also demonstrates her acquaintance with Solomon’s Proverbs, which contain many denunciations of calumny: “He that uttereth slander is a fool” (10.18) or “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (12.18). The “Sage” is a reference to Aristotle who, in the Éthique à Nicomaque (4.9), defined shame as both

104 According to Ilsley (127 Note 17), the prelate could be Charles de Hacqueville, a maternal cousin and bishop of Soissons.
an emotional and physical ailment.\textsuperscript{105} The zoological world appears with the mention of ermine since the motto \textit{malo mori quam faedari} ("I prefer to die rather than be soiled"), was adopted by Ferdinand, king of Naples, in 1464 for the emblem of the order of knights, and by Britons seeking to remain independent from France. If caged, ermines have been known to die rather than dirty their coats.

As quoted by Gournay, Plato’s advice to his citizens comes directly from Montaigne’s essay “De la Gloire”: “Et Platon, employant toutes choses à rendre ses citoyens vertueux, leur conseille aussi de ne mespriser la bonne réputation et estimation des peuples” (2: 16, 613 c). In the \textit{Maccabees}, Eleazar was a “leading sage” of Judea who died rather than give the appearance of having eaten forbidden food that Antiochus would force Jews to eat as punishment (2: 6.18-31). As Jonathan Goldstein’s\textsuperscript{106} commentary on this passage makes clear, the stories of Eleazar and other pious Jews who accepted death rather than transgress their convictions, constitute “the earliest surviving examples of elaborate stories of monotheists suffering martyrdom and are the direct source for the patterns that thereafter prevailed in Jewish and Christian literature; the dialogue between the martyr and his persecutors and tormentor . . . the martyr’s persistent faith to the death” (282). Gournay plainly feels some affiliation with martyrs and imitates this judeo-christian literary tradition. She goes so far as to evoke Jesus Christ in the final lines of \textit{Apologie}, “le Fils de l’homme mesme [qui] n’a point trouvé Pierre à reposer son chef” (2: 1429). There is the same pattern of the dialogue between martyr and tormentor,

\textsuperscript{105} For the sources cited by Gournay, see Arnould (2: 1378 Notes A-E).
\textsuperscript{106} Jonathan Goldstein ed., \textit{Maccabees} (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983).
when she calls out to her readers: the prélat, her contemporaries and, as she says, “ceux qui m’accusent” (2: 1400). She questions, defends, interjects: “J’ay dis un mot ailleur” (2: 1376), “Je dis” (2: 1379), “Continuons” (2: 1381), “j’apporte en ma conversation” (2: 1382). What is absent from *Apologie* is the calmness of Eleazar who “went straight to the torture instrument” (*Maccabees* 2: 6.28). Instead, Gournay forcefully contests the forces working against her: “Mais combien donc sont archi-foux ces amis-cy” (2: 1384). Her conviction is that she must work to overturn common opinion to safeguard a place in paradise among future readers.

The use of *auctores*, as in the above passage, illustrates the quasi-obsessive need Gournay felt to establish her own authority. According to Broomhall, early modern writers retained the literary theory of imitation which instituted classical works and authors as superior sources, while also functioning as a “separation from ‘the other’, unlettered and the female, thus perpetuating the notion of the canon as a tradition of a male intellectual literary elite” (75). While this argument accounts for the erasure of many women authors, it also helps draw attention to the kinship, the common bonds that Gournay nurtured with her choice of references, as she places herself among the authorized texts she summons up. It is her concept of wisdom – “seul un sage comprend un sage”\(^\text{107}\) – that leads her to draw on the dominant discourse to ensure her defense. As wisdom, or *suffisance*, does not rely on sex or social position, she invites her reader to

\(\text{107 This concept is discussed again below.}\)
reread and rediscover the authors she cites. As Évelyne Berriot-Salvadore\textsuperscript{108} notes, this traditional rhetoric is a deliberate and professed decision in Gournay’s combat against common opinion. As such, “cette nouvelle exégèse des exempla construit ce que l’on pourrait nommer une défense et illustration de la raison féminine” (86). To be sure, Gournay leads her audience to reflect on the place of women in society, their intellectual capacity and their moral virtue to a much greater extent than the catalogs of illustrious women that circulated.

In 1634, Gournay adds a preface to her compilation; it is addressed to ‘Sophorosine,’ an unknown figure, who serves as Gournay’s interlocuter as she describes \textit{Advis}: “Une guide generale encore au Public, pour l’esclairer en la lecture des Escrits, autant qu’il est en moy de luy rendre ce service, et en luy de le recevoir” (1: 554). The process of reading is presented as a negotiated activity whereby both the writer and the reader have a responsibility to collaborate on a shared horizon of expectations, or at least to reduce the margin that separates them. Aware that she was out of sync with her times, Gournay accepts her part in this authorial contract by discussing the language, style and content of her different works and what she hoped to achieve with them. Once again, a character trait from \textit{Pincture} manifests itself when she imputes her own idealistic principles of reason and good faith onto a contemporary reader who does not want to enter into her constructs but prefers to undermine a “sçavante” without wealth.

One paradox in these autobiographical texts is in fact her idealism. The effectiveness of her arguments is compromised, Venesoen argues, by her lack of mistrust of the “sourires de bienveillance” (Études 41). At times this idealism takes the form of a self-righteous diatribe; Gournay wonders why others cannot see the world – be it the dangers in calumny or the profound merit of Montaigne’s writings – as she does. This is a major source of exasperation for her. Her remedy for the “ignorance” of others is to resolutely persevere in justifications. And persevere she does to the end, with the belief that the future will judge her as favorably as Montaigne and others once had. Within the social context in which Gournay evolved, however, this idealism preempted her otherwise lucid analysis of social, economic and political conventions from successfully promoting herself and her work. The only praise she intended to receive from Apologie is in the recognition of its truthfulness. Her use of the word creance is provocative when she turns to those whose “malice does not exceed their caution” to gain “une creance favorable” (1: 562-63). From creire, an old form of croire, “creance” highlights two different problems Gournay is looking to remediate. As Furetière explains, “Tiltre d'une somme due par un debiteur à un creancier ; Lettre de creance, est la Lettre de recommandation dont est porteur celuy qui n'a qu'une instruction de bouche, afin qu'on adjouste foy à ce qu'il dira.” The first problem involves debts, the amount due to creditors, and the second involves being granted faith from others. By giving an itemized account of her hardships, Gournay wants to inspire belief or faith. She also needs monetary credit, for an author facing discredit risked losing patronage: “n’ayant espoir de secours en mes besoins, que par les Roys, et le perdant presque du tout, lors que ces
parleurs démentent quelque particulière estime, méritée ou non, en laquelle les gens d’honneur me tiennent…” (2: 1400-01). Gournay uses the word “creance” throughout her work to refer to both notions.109 In Apologie, honor and livelihood are intimately linked in her “creance favorable”.

The notions of honor and money are linked again in one of Gournay’s references to Plato’s Apology:

Il peut bien estre cependant, que jamais aucune roideur d’ame, reserve celle de Socrates, n’alla nettement et constamment jusques à ce poinct, de mespriser le reproche des fautes et des vices, puisque les actions reiglées et les vertus s’achetent ordinairement si cher par les auteurs: et celuy qui plus opiniastrement ayme de tells orne mens, et les acquiert, et traffique à plus haut prix, trouve plus de peine à mespriser ce reproche. (2: 1377-78)

At the time Gournay wrote, proper behavior and virtue came at a high price, but not only in the figurative sense. Early-modern France witnessed evolutions in the rituals and tastes that formed the symbolic. The pomp and circumstance of the prince transitioned into shows of aristocratic lavishness. As Maurice Magendie showed (31-32) in his discussion of politesse mondaine, in seeking to please through their appearances, courtiers of this period “semblent avoir un peu trop confondu la profusion et la distinction; ils veulent étonner, provoquer l’admiration . . . Le luxe des femmes, à la même époque, était lui aussi, lourd, excessif; . . . elles abusaient.” Excessive expenditures on clothing, jewelry, powders and perfumes filtered down from costumed balls and public ceremonies to everyday life to the point that a lack of money became “la maladie du siècle” during the

109 The glossary of Oeuvres complètes. (2: 1982) lists thirteen references for usages closer to “belief” and three for usages closer to “credit.” Sometimes, however, the text lends itself to both interpretations.
regency of Marie de Médicis. In her financial state of affairs, Gournay simply could not compete in court circles where it was better to “pêcher par excès de recherché, que de venir à un ballet . . . avec un ‘pourpoint de satin blanc fort gras’” (Magendie 32).

“La maladie du siècle” is undeniably a leitmotif in Gournay’s work. When she recounts how she fell into social disgrace following her family’s loss of revenue during the Wars of Religion, she painstakingly details her family’s financial ruin, giving an itemized account of her expenses, to prove that she is not the source of their decline. By her own account, those without riches cannot achieve esteem, forcing the comment that there is little hope her unfortunate affairs and social standing will improve: “mesmement en ceste saison et parmy nos moeurs, ou celles de tout autre Estat vieil et malade” (2: 1379). She decrays those who are “morally bankrupt,” not only for abandoning her, but for accusing her of deception. As long as she concealed her financial problems, as long as le paraître was functioning, she had friends who sung her praises and sought her out as an acquaintance, her house “ayant tousjours esté pendant ce temps-là fort frequentée, et mon accez libre à chacun . . . ” (2: 1381). Upon learning of her hard times they reproached her for dishonesty and abandoned her, preferring “a bowl of soup” to her friendship (2: 1383). Gournay also launches into a detailed account of her expenditures on alchemy, and denies rumors of extravagant spending on pages, maids, a lute player, dinners, lodgings, food, furniture and her carriage. Any spending, she swears, was largely within “les bornes de ma condition que je recongnois fort mediocre” (2: 1398). The figures may be “undeniably malhonnêtes” by seventeenth-century standards, as Stanton asserts (her emphasis 25), but the issue here is the image Gournay’s elaborate
justifications portray as she disputes the claims of her financial mismanagement – “la suitee caquets qui se trouve capable de porter coup de ruine” – by presenting herself as a victim of bad fortune and slander (2: 1401).

A noteworthy point here is Gournay’s use of imagery. “Caquets,” cackling, gossip, was typically used in popular imagery to portray a female vice. Yet Gournay repeats it throughout her text to refer to the slander from all those, both men and women, which had damaged her reputation. She knows “la cause du venin” which strikes her but will not compromise her convictions “à l’appetit de ces gens, en intention de reprimer leur bave” (2: 1404). The pain expressed here can be put in relation to her treatise “De la Médisance” and to her poem “A Lentin,” both from 1626. This poem, with ninety-seven lines, is one of the longest in “Bouquet” and needs to be briefly addressed here as it plays on the same register of martyrdom as Apologie, with people whose “bave” (spittle) of lies never ceases. Here too, bit by the venomous snake of calumny, Gournay falls from social grace, the Eden she had experienced with Montaigne:

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Jadis tu me prisois bien fort,
Depuis m’offençant à grand tort,
Et voyant ma Vertu capable,
De rendre ce tort plus coulpable;
Tu ne cesses de bavasser,
Esperant mon luster effacer.
Or Lentin je souffre sans peine
Les coups de ta langue inhumaine:
Puis que comme le fleau des Cieux,
Elle frappe jeunes et vieux:
Ainsi serpens, peste et vermines
Versent par tout maux et ruines
…………………………………
Le Monde est une cage à foux,
Gens de Cour le sont plus que tous. . . . (2: 1780)
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The poem then speaks of calumny as a “bourreau,” an “executioner”, on three occasions, but concludes with hope for the future. The “faveur des Roys” will eventually uphold her reputation against the “caquets nouveaux et vieux, / Naissans de legere croyance” (2: 1782). Gournay holds strong beliefs, unlike those who spread gossip with their “ langue en glaive trenchant” who will ultimately suffer vengeance as their own actions will ultimately turn against them.

In both “A Lentin” and Apologie, biblical images of evil are conjured up for Gournay to combat, thereby proving herself victorious over adversity and meritorious in society. As Stanton notes, the passage from Apologie where she defends her convictions from the “appetite” of others,” (2: 1404) is indeed a “critical turning point [where] the speaking subject accepts her eccentricity in the eyes of others and declares her willingness to endure calumny rather that construct the self according to their specifications” (27). Gournay draws parallels between herself and the heroic figures of Eleazar and Socrates who remain unfaalterning in their convictions. After these similarities are drawn, Gournay then fashions herself as the accuser when she refers to the appetite of her detractors. It is they who are the real guilty ones, guilty of gluttony in their appetite for defamation.

At times Gournay’s descriptions of her everyday life seem quite pitiful: “Je n’eus jamais qu’un lict de laine en toute saison, la tapisserie legere et le reste à l’advent. La calomnie me force à conter ce monceau de sornettes, afin d’essayer à la reprimer” (2: 1399). This was not the first time she had to clarify her finances: when her brothers sought to make her the source of the le Jars family ruin, she had a notary certify a private
document in which she listed her incomes, expenses and belongings. In it one finds “‘le drap de lin petit et usé’ qui vaut 1 écu (3 livres)...et surtout ‘le ciel de petit point’” (Fogel 104). A blanket and bed canopy may seem trivial or even miserly in the inventory of a noble woman’s estate. Yet these details underscore the extent to which the private was poignantly fused with the public in Gournay’s persona.

These details of the worth of seemingly inconsequential possessions also point to Gournay’s chief enemy – poverty – for means could buy social credit. This relative poverty is compounded by the two other factors that make up her triple bind. She is a woman and she is learned. As she describes her situation, nothing could be more “foolish” or “ridiculous” after poverty than being “clair-voyant et sçavant: combien plus d’estre clair-voyante et sçavante ou d’avoir simplement, ainsi que moy, désiré de se rendre telle?” (2: 1392). She is aware of the image that lettered women have in society:

“Parmy nostre Vulgaire, on fagotte à fantasies l’image des femmes Lettrées: on compose d’elles une fricassee d’extravagances et de chimeres...ce Vulgaire ne la comprend en façon quelconque...C’est merveille des belles choses, qu’on luy fait dire et faire en dormant (2: 1392)”.

At times Gournay’s discourse takes on the tone of the combative plea in Grief, a more explicitly feminist essay: “En fin toute forme saine et forte est repudiée en nostre saison, et l’est aux femmes jusques à l’outrage, si elles ne son redoutée par consideration de la puissance de leur parentage...ou de leurs moyens” (2: 1402). Her exasperation is such that she even cries out to be simply left alone: “Mais, mon Dieu! Que ne me laisse t’on jouir du passeport de l’ignorance?” (2: 1395). Indeed, as will be shown in the
following chapter, both her supposed ignorance and her knowledge would provide the material for jokes and parodies. But here she asks that the “learned” decide between the two once and for all. If Gournay is without knowledge of letters and sciences, she argues, it is because she is without “old medals in a closet” – useless objects acquired in some vainglorious act of male conquest – “l’une des principales suffisances de nostre Siecle” (2: 1395).

In her essays, Gournay delves into authoritative texts, auctores, interprets Scriptures and presents herself as a disciple of the fathers of philosophy, a methodical imperative for the admissibility of arguments. The apprehension and perplexity she evokes touches both popular and learned culture since a woman who wrote was a priori suspected of diverse wrong doings and bad intentions. Beginning in the sixteenth century, social codes circumscribing women’s activities became prevalent, hence the expression “Parolles sont femmes mais les faits sont masles” found in Gabriel Meurier’s catalog of proverbs, Tresor de sentences dorées (1582). Popular images of women, from the fishmonger to the refined young lady, have them possessing superior verbal dexterity over men; both women, however, are dangerous to social order.

Despite her energetic and forceful approach in Apologie, Gournay’s “longue vie exposée aux yeux du monde” brings to mind a public career nearing its end. But if, as Hillman notes (109), her displays of despair, anger and self-justification show “an

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110 Dorlin (41-47) develops this thesis in relation to Schurman and Suchon, two other women writers of the seventeenth-century.

111 Gabriel Meurier, Tresor de sentences dorées, dicts, proverbes & dictons communs, reduits selon l'ordre alphabetic (Lyon: Rigaud, 1582).
uncannily similar mixture of tones” to that of Alinda in Promenoir, I do not believe that they take on the tone of “self-immolation” that he suggests. Apologie recounts Gournay’s past successes and appeals to the better judgment and reception of future generations. She speaks eloquently at times but does not want to serve as a sacrificial lamb to her false friends. When she learned of their bad intentions, she hastened them to leave for “qui se fait brebis le loup le mange” (2: 1383). She saw herself in the image of the son of Croesus who, even though he was mute, was able to cry out in warning to his father (2: 1413). Her contemporaries could try to prevent her from speaking, but she would be heard.

As Arnould observes, unlike Montaigne’s self-portraits, Gournay’s essays are conscious of the future and as such present a fragmented portrait, “orienté dans un sens apologétique et apprêté pour la postérité” (24). She does admit to sacrificing her virtue by her public self-justifications but, she feels, her public demonstration was warranted: “Si n’eusse-je jamais osé lascher de tells propos ny de telles narratons public, si les caquets ne m’eussent si mal menée en tout le subject de ce Traicté” (2: 1413-14). Her fault lies in being “une femme qui parle” and even more profoundly in being “celle qui écrit”. Gournay puts her faith in another place and time, a utopia where sages rule. According to Sankovitch, it was Gournay’s reading of the Essais that “made her conceive of herself as someone both embattled and compelled to do battle. Her early history of frustration and penury is certainly at the basis of the myth she creates for herself, that of the epic hero confronting a hostile, jeering world” (81). Gournay’s choice of Plato’s Greece and biblical figures for her mythopoeic material becomes part of her process of liberation
from the enclosed and stifling world of Gournay-sur-Aronde. She mounts a quest for a vanished golden age where she can exercise her intellectual ambitions as an equal.

In the final notice following *Copie* that concludes the two editions of *Ombre* and the different editions of *Advis*, Gournay seeks to fix her writings for all eternity:

> Si ce Livre me survit, je defend à toute personne, telle qu’elle soit, d’y adjouster, diminuer, ny changer jamais aucune chose, soit aux mots ou en la substance, soubs peine à ceux qui l’entreprendroient d’estre tenus aux yeux des gens d’honneur, pour violateurs d’un sepulcre innocent…Les insolences, voire les meurtres de reputation que je voy tous les jours faire en cas pareil dans cet impertinent Siecle, me convient à lascher cette imprecation. (2: 1864)

Having suffered from the parody made of her “Vie de la damoiselle de Gournay,” and reproaches for her antiquated style, Gournay fears for her posterity. Even though she presents herself again as a victim of disrespect and character assassination, she is far from passive when she lets loose a curse whereby anyone who dares touch a word of her works will be brought before “honorable people” and judged as desecrator of an “innocent grave.” For Gournay, the fear of public punishment is clearly preemptory.

**Social intercourse and “pièces de circonstance”**

Texts other than Gournay’s specifically autobiographical pieces uncover similar tactics at self-fashioning. These texts, which Noiset calls “pièces de circonstance” (*Marie de Gournay* 67), include *Bienvenue* (1608), written during the pregnancy of Marie de Médicis and developed into several other works such as “Naissance de messeigneurs les enfans de France” (1608), “Institution du Prince” (1619), “De l’Education de Messeigneurs les Enfans de France” (1626). In 1610, following the regicide of Henri IV,
Gournay writes an *Adieu* which undergoes major revisions to later form several different treatises. In 1641 a “Naissance de Monsieur de Dauphin” is added to *Advis*, in honor of the birth of the future Louis XIV, but other texts also dedicated to Cardinals Du Perron (1626) and Richelieu (1635), and *Égalité* (1622) is addressed to Anne of Austria. In an extremely bold gesture, in 1624, Gournay even sends the king her rewritten version of Ronsard’s “Harangue,” under the title *Remerciement au Roy*. “La Médisance” is written to Antoinette Pons, Marquise de Guercheville, and this “Dame d’honneur de la Reyne Mere du Roy” receives two quatrains in “Bouquet de Pinde” while her son, husband and daughter-in-law are also paid respects with poems. In 1626 *Promenoir* is preceded by a new “Advis” in which Gournay explains that it would be wrong of her to refuse “quelques Dames du premier rang” who asked her to republish the novel. This type of justification was indeed so common for her different works that, as Arnould explains (1: 703 Note B): “Présenter la publication d’un ouvrage comme acte d’obéissance à un Grand est un *topos* des épîtres dédicatoires que M. de Gournay exploite.”

One instance where this *topos* occurs is in the liminary letter “Au Lecteur” of *Bienvenue de Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou* which will later introduce *Ombre* and *Advis*. “Si le Zele de ceux que touche ce Livret m’eust permis de m’en croire, j’eusse passé à dormir ce peu d’heures que j’ay passées à l’escrire . . . Et ne l’eusse encore osé produire après l’avoir composé, si je n’estois obligée de faire fruict au Public” (1: 568). Here too Gournay displays an acute insight into the distance that separates her work from the expectations of the public. She addresses the reader with such self-deprecating irony that the reader could, at first, think that these liminary remarks serve to present a sense of
humility, a false, yet nevertheless necessary, sense of reservation about the worthiness of
the product offered up for inspection, a common form of justification. This type of
dialogue respects literary practices of the time and is a tacit acceptance of the writer-
reader relation in which the writer depends directly on the reader’s approval and
understanding for security and longevity.

While Gournay employs a traditional framework of reverence, she refrains from
any sort of obsequiousness. On the contrary, she pushes the limits of decorum by
flaunting a certain irreverence for the public under the guise of modesty. Rather than
profusely praising the king, she opens by stating that she would not have dared publish
the book on her own, but did so out of obligation to him because his good will alone is
what made the book possible. She ironically questions what a reader of her time could
find of interest in *Advis* with its “franche simplicité” – which she claims not to like – and
its “sentimens moulez à l’air d’un autre Siecle” (568). Gournay’s rhetoric of simplicity in
the introductory letter functions to veil her desire for recognition. Her claim not to like
the openness of her work is made to give her discourse more credence as she would have
the reader believe that she cannot help but be open, even though she should perhaps be
more guarded. Yet this mask of *franchise* is couched in a discourse full of irony, adding
another layer of complexity. It is by means of this paradoxical discussion of her
simplicity that Gournay sketches her ideal reader, one who is capable of seeing through
her mask to grasp the true worth of her writing “au goust de la venerable Antiquité” (1:
570). Her complicity is shared only with those who are as particular in their choice of
texts as she is in her choice of readers but, as she states, few rise above the ignorance and
fashion that plague her contemporaries. In contrast to the current generation, there is the evocation of the “other” century, the mythical age gone by which she has constructed to liberate and empower herself, one of wisdom, erudition and poetic inspiration.

This text’s satirical tone is developed further in later editions. The “m’eust permis de m’en croire” of 1608, 1626 and 1634 ultimately becomes “m’eust permis de me taire” in the 1641 version. In 1626, when Gournay defines her book as “un raba-joye, perpetuel raffineur de moeurs et de jugemens: qui t’espie de coin en coin pour te mettre en doute, tantost de ta prud’hommie, tantost de ta suffisance: et qui pour cet effect prend le nom d’Advis” (569), it becomes a source of torment for others, the ignorant people of her time who do not know how to write “de la façon des Muses” and who do not deign “priser une femme qui se fust efforcée d’arriver cet excès” (1: 570). In my opinion this phrase runs contrary to Noiset’s assertion (“Marie de Gournay et le caprice” 194) that she “attribue entièrement l’insuccès présumé de ses écrits à la dissipation de l’époque et nullement à sa condition féminine.” Gournay does indeed define herself here as a woman who writes and who “se fust efforcée” to attain her erudition; the reason she is not valued for her efforts is precisely because, as she states, she is “celle qui escrit.”

As was described in the case of Copie above, Gournay’s strategy was to create a niche for herself amongst prominent people for the purpose of ensuring some degree of protection and financial support. Henri IV asked her to frequent the Court and she did receive pensions. This process of seeking out patronage and favor was more than simply well-accepted for men, it would become an integral practice for the honnête homme. When Nicolas Faret’s L’Honnête homme ou l’art de plaire à la cour (1630) gives a
number of qualities and precepts for the honnête homme to follow, the most important involves pleasing important people: “Or la premiere et la plus utile leçon que l’on doit pratiquer, c’est de gagner d’abord l’opinion des grands et des honnestes gens, et de tâcher à meriter les bonnes graces des femmes, qui ont la reputation de donner le prix aux hommes . . .” (40). Yet when Gournay followed what was then an imperative for polite society, dedicating her essays to various well-placed individuals before presenting her work as a whole to the public at large, she operated under the career guidelines set out for men alone. In Faret’s equation, women may provide patronage but do not seek it. By putting herself forward to people in positions of power and reaching out to her contemporaries, Gournay engages in a form of social intercourse which was not intended for women (Broomhall 73) but designed as a civilizing activity between elite men. They were expected to participate in debates on politics, economy, religion and as such they studied rhetoric which gave them skills in the arts of public speaking. Constructions of femininity, on the other hand, linked women’s speech to the body which by nature was viewed as unruly. For women, silence was a sign of chastity, whereas Gournay’s voice would be loudly heard in her 1595 preface to Montaigne’s Essais.

**Outburst of temper: the 1595 preface to the Essais**

This preface is perhaps the most studied of all of Gournay’s texts, but her self-inscriptions in this piece must be included here as they provide a provocative social commentary of her past and present, and the customs and mores of the time imbedded in it allow the reader to glimpse how cultural control mechanisms functioned. Gournay’s
fight against the two social evils she despised the most, ignorance and slander, would be countered by cultural corrections to limit her movement into male dominated arenas, in this case, literary criticism. She would be subjected to what Greenblatt later called culture as constraint, “a pervasive technology of control” to limit social behavior (“Culture” 225). This regulation succeeded in producing a reception so hostile and so far reaching that Gournay’s vast work would be brushed aside for several hundred years with a “smile, a nod or some joke,” or with a condescending comment: “‘C’est un gentil Livre’ . . . un enfant de huit années en droit bien autant” (1:326). In her 1595 preface to the *Essais*, when Gournay rails against what she perceives to be a cold reception by a “crowd of blind men” to Montaigne and to the work that had sent her into a mystical trance when she first read it, all unfavorable opinion is caustically dismissed when she adds that it would be “an insult” to be praised by those one would not want to resemble anyway (277-78).

According to Arnould (1: 279 note A), the first reception of *Essais* was largely favorable but probably not to the level the work deserved, and certainly not what Gournay, for whom the work was above reproach, expected. For Boase, Gournay is “untrustworthy” in estimating Montaigne’s popularity, for “nothing short of her own enthusiasm would satisfy [her]” (65). In autobiographical fashion Gournay first speaks of the lack of consideration she, as a woman, receives, and of the plight of women in general, who are neither believed nor listened to:

Bien heureux es tu, Lecteur, sit u n’ez pas d’un sexe, qu’on ait interdit de tous les biens, l’interdisant de la liberté, et encore interdit de toutes les vertus, lui soustrayant le pouvoir…affin de lui constituer pour vertu
seulle et beatitude, ignorer et souffrir...il n’y a si chetif qui ne me r’embarre avec solenne approbation de la compagnie assistante, par un soubsris, un hochet, ou quelque plaisanterie, quand il aura dit, C’est une femme qui parle...Tel se taisant par mepris ravira le monde en admiration de sa gravité...Cetuy-là disant trente sottises, emportera le prix encore par sa barbe...Et tel autre le sent, qui tourne le discourse en rissée, ou bien en escopterie de caquet perpetuel...et se met à vomir plaisamment force belles choses qu’on ne lui demande pas...Je veux un mal si horrible à cette imperfection qui me blesse tant, qu’il faut que je l’injure en public. Je pardonne à ceux qui s’en mocquent: se sont ils obligez d’estre aussi habiles qu’Aristippus, ou Xenophon... (1: 283-84).

This preface, or as Ilsley would refer to it, “an outburst of temper based on [Gournay’s] own experience,” would be withdrawn later under such a wave of criticism that Gournay feared for Montaigne’s own posterity. In a pathetic gesture she tore out the prefaces of several copies of the 1595 edition she was sending out for foreign publication, notably those she sent to Justus Lipsius (2: 1940). In a different preface she wrote for the 1598 edition, she apologized for her youthful indulgence. The original 1595 preface, though, was subsequently published in 1599, in the third edition of Promenoir, and would become the introductory passage of, Grief, in 1641.

The 1595 text is notable on many levels, but within the theoretical framework of this discussion, what the reader discovers is an author passionately conscious of the importance and impact of expressing one’s opinion, in public, in the defense of honor, that is to say Montaigne’s, in early modern France. Gournay, however, does so at the expense of the text she is defending when she cannot control her ardor for the subject: “Le vrai scandale est là: elle ne voulait pas, mais ‘son âme’ n’a pas su se passer de parler en ‘ce lieu’ de lui et d’elle” (Franchetti 223). This was Gournay’s first instance of braving a public to repair an honor she saw as tarnished, for, according to codes of civility at the
time, dishonor was comparable to death. As Antoine de Courtin would note later in his *Traité du point-d’honneur, et des regles pour converser & se conduire sagement avec les incivils & les fâcheux* (1675), “[Honor] c’est cela seul qui rend heureux ; c’est ce que l’on préfère à la vie enfin, c’est tout ce qu’il y de plus…sacré parmi les hommes.” By taking an active role in this social stratagem of protecting Montaigne’s honor, Gournay would also open herself up to many cycles of vengeance, not for voicing her defense of Montaigne, but simply for voicing an opinion in public. The strength of the conviction that leads her into public duels of words throughout her life makes her a public woman; for her detractors she is an all too easy target in a period where virtue demands discretion and retreat.

The 1595 preface staunchly defends Montaigne’s penchant for the autoportrait, deemed vain by his detractors. For Jean Marie Goulemot\(^\text{112}\) (366), speaking about oneself was considered frivolous or even sinful because the inner self was not considered an appropriate source of wisdom or knowledge. Of interest here is that, in defending the value of autobiographical inquest, Gournay foreshadows two future events, one inherently personal and one which figures into literary history. Firstly, Gournay will infuse her own writings and particularly *Apologie* with her own preoccupations, positions and vehement self-justifications. Secondly, by promoting the value of the self as subject, she supports the concept of autobiography as an independent literary genre whereas it would be considered marginal, inferior, “the dark continent of literature”, until the latter

half of the twentieth century when much critical inquiry would be devoted to “the essential autobiographical quest: the constitution of the self as subject” (Stanton 19).

Gournay’s preface to the *Essais* also contains a lengthy condemnation of common opinion, a recurring theme in her work; if one is seeking praise, “c’est de ceux qui sont louables” (1:279). Two separate treatises, “Antipathie des ames basses et hautes” (1626), and “Que Par Necessité les grands esprits et les gens de bien se cherchent leurs semblables” (1626) are developed from passages in the 1595 preface, as well as liminary letters and other sections throughout her work. These different texts underscore the seeming paradox in which common opinion is viewed as contrary to wisdom. As Arnould (1: 279) noted, this notion inspired from stoicism corresponded to Montaigne’s own idea of “suffisance”. Lipsius in fact responded (2: 1932) to Gournay’s first letter with the fundamental axiom “De même que seule une âme comprend une âme, de même seul un sage comprend un sage.” It would stand to reason, then, by the use of this commonplace axiom, that Lipsius considered Gournay among the sages; her recognition of Montaigne’s greatness is proof of the similitude of their souls. Indeed Fogel (22) and Millet (“Les Préfaces” 83) analyze this letter as the guarantee, *la caution*, to Gournay’s discovery of Montaigne. Thanks to this letter, her mother allowed her to visit Montaigne in Paris; ultimately, Lipsius’s recognition of her contributed much to her perception of herself and her self-fashioning, and, as Fogel argues (24), his multiple references to

\[113\textbf{Qui ipse valde magnus ut animam nisi anima non capit; sic sapientem nisi sapiens.}\]

Trans. by Millet 83.
virgin, wisdom and Montaigne, would also fix the boundaries of the stories that would be told about her.

As I hope to have shown, Gournay’s different autobiographical pieces demonstrate an acute awareness of being a character in her own play. Desperately trying to write her own text, she seeks to capitalize on her personal relations by taking her opinions into a public forum. Unfortunately her social status would be compromised by her lack of finances and her unorthodox desire to earn a living from the profession of writing. To justify her transgressions of social codes, Gournay needed to establish her own authority. To do so, she adopted classical and modern writers as her models and conjured up mythic figures, patterning herself after them. Her intense self-fashioning, however, would not produce the desired outcome as she would become a target for mystification and ridicule. As Greenblatt maintains, the process of self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an “alien,” the Other.114 Applied to Gournay, this encounter took place between, on the one hand, the authority of her erudition, her networking with prominent people and her use of classical and modern texts as exempla, and, on the other hand, the codes of discipline of a patriarchal society which demanded control of the means of access to power. What was produced in this clash partakes of both the authority and of the Other marked for the attack, thus creating a perversion, distortion, or, as Stankovitch says (93), “a certain self-simplification.” As with all instances of self-fashioning discussed by Greenblatt (9), Gournay’s achieved

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114 Greenblatt uses the term “alien” to refer to that which is strange, hostile, a threatening Other, Renaissance (9).
identity also contained within it the signs of its own subversion. The following chapter is devoted to those mechanisms, by which her *persona* was remolded, undermined, in sum, re-mythified and her works largely erased.
CHAPTER 2
MYSTIFICATION AND THE MISE EN SCÈNE
OF GOURNAY

Cultural analysis is both intrinsic and extrinsic, requiring a careful reading of the text and an investigation into the situation in which it was produced. It is then that we can recover a sense of the stakes of the writer and the public. In Greenblatt’s concept of culture as “constraint and mobility,” culture functions as a “pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform” (“Culture” 225). This enforcement of cultural boundaries through praise and blame played a large role in the creation of Gournay’s persona. The purpose of this chapter is to consider how her self-fashioning, her mimesis of traditionally male interests and occupations, exposed her to mystification, a form of entertainment whereby an appointed victim becomes the target of pranks and jokes for the amusement of a group. The texts in which Gournay’s persona appear, only to be denigrated, include political tracts, poetry and farces that make light of her age, linguistic principles, attachment to Montaigne, her virginity or a combination of these. These fictional works need a systematic study, an “intrinsic analysis,” to illustrate how her public disciplining played out, and this, despite Gournay’s favorable reception by many prominent figures of her time.
When Paul Lacroix described the origins of mystification, he wrote that its purpose was to laugh and make others laugh at the expense of the simple and innocent who were “mercilessly sacrificed.” He also included a discussion of the fifteenth-century fraternity of the “Mère-Sotte” whose motto was “the number of fools is infinite.” The edifying role of this group was to correct the vices, faults and “ridicules de l’humanité” by putting them on stage. Of particular relevance in the case of Gournay is that public disciplining – for the purpose of correcting socially transgressive behavior – is expressed in the religious terms of a “sacrifice,” “brotherhood” and “mission.” It is with a sense of fervor and duty then that Gournay’s detractors attacked her folies, making her an “originale,” the product of a subversive construction. Satire, parody and humiliation were the consequences of Gournay moving beyond the boundaries established for noble women and for courtiers. These boundaries are generated by the “extrinsic” elements of culture, the established and the emerging ways of being, doing and knowing for the period, in sum, the “why” behind the creation of models to which Gournay was expected to conform. Satire, as a genre, then works to police transgressions beyond the established models of practice. As important and influential as the works discussed below were when they first appeared, their power to chastise and ridicule evaporated as cultural models evolved and Gournay’s works were left behind. This phenomenon is common to all works of satire and panegyric. But it must be recognized

115 *Stultorum infinitus est numerus.*
that today’s reader remains largely at a loss in understanding the impact of such texts, for “they cannot in themselves enable us to recover a sense of the stakes that once gave readers pleasure and pain . . . We can begin to do so simply by a heightened attention to the beliefs and practices implicitly enforced by particular literary acts . . .” (Greenblatt “Culture” 226). Gournay was made into an object of, supposedly innate, ridicule. Literary acts challenged her views on politics and language, her celibacy, her networking with controversial humanists, her relationship with Montaigne and her exploration of alchemy all of which contributed to the ostracizing violence which targeted her.

Throughout her work, from her 1595 preface to the *Essais*, to her first treatise on education, “Bienvenue de Monseigneur le Duc d’Anjou” (1608), written at the birth of Henry IV’s third son, and to her esthetic ideals on poetry, as in “Deffence de la Poësie et du langage des Poetes” (1626), Gournay “a parfaitement su provoquer une exasperation mêlée d’amusement et son fort caractère a comme obnubilé ses rares lecteurs, aux dépens de ses oeuvres” (Arnould 9). The outcry that follows her publication of *Adieu de l’Ame du Roy de France et de Navarre, Henry le Grand, à la Royne. Avec, la defence des Peres Jesuites* (1610) after the assassination of the king, however, witnesses one of the most publicly hurtful and degrading incidents of her life. Gournay will be caught up in one of the most controversial political affairs of her time, the assassination of King Henry IV in May 1610 by Ravaillac. The political tension of this time period merits some attention to better understand the audacity of Gournay’s *Adieu*, and the reaction which followed. In 1603 Henri IV abolished the edict which had previously exiled the Jesuits in 1594 and they were reintroduced to the Court in 1604 with Father Coton becoming the king’s
personal confessor. As Thomas Worcester notes, nearly all royal confessors in France “from the time of Coton and for more than 150 years were Jesuits” (61). But suspicion and animosity against the Jesuits persisted for historical reasons. Following Ravaillac’s execution, Parliament was concerned with social unrest and looked to condemn any text which could be construed as justifying regicide. One text targeted was a treatise by the Spanish Jesuit, Juan Mariana (1536-1624), *De rege et regis institutione libri III* (1599) which condoned the killing of despots. Father Coton and other Jesuits spoke out to defend their order by retracing the calumnies spread against them and by commending the Jesuits’ pedagogical missions.

For Gournay, it is was the blanket condemnation of the Order that needed refutation, for it exemplified the greatest moral and philosophical dilemma she combatted throughout her years of writing, that of the personal and professional devastation created by slander and scandal. The king’s *favorite* and his confessor were prime targets for slander and jealousy based on their relative power and proximity to the monarch. As Charles Lenient (160) asserts, despite Henri’s prestige and popularity, neither Gabrielle d’Estrée, his mistress, nor “le doux et moelleux P. Coton” were safe from the attacks and intrigues of the court. The king may have shown inconsistencies in his mistresses but he

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remained faithful to his confessor, Father Coton, to the point that some people believed the confessor to have some magical power over the king. The courtiers, ministers and mistresses found themselves outdistanced by Father Coton: “Henri raffolait du P. Coton: Il voulait l’avoir partout, le soir, le matin, à table, dans son carrosse. Pour expliquer cette étrange fascination, les gens avisés soupçonnaient quelque maléfice, l’existence d’un miroir magique : à coup sûr le P. Coton était sorcier” (Lenient 162-63). Even though he refuted Mariana’s treatise, Father Coton was made to appear as Ravaillac’s accomplice in a series of pamphlets. *L’Anti-Coton* (1610) synthesized the attacks and condemned the Jesuites, as a whole, for parricide. Lenient describes (198) how despite having little literary value, *L’Anti-Coton* was “la machine de guerre la plus formidable organisée contre les Jésuites.” Gournay thus faced a formidable opponent in her case to defend the honor and integrity of the religious order. Papers for and against the Jesuits were published in rapid succession. Gournay acted quickly and in August of 1610 *Adieu* received a privilege.

There remains some uncertainty as to Gournay’s precise motivations for implicating herself. Fogel asserts that her editor may have wanted to capitalize on the polemical nature of the debate: “Que vient faire celle qui signe ‘La Damoiselle de Gournay dans cet affrontement? Je ne voudrais pas diminuer son mérite, si mérite il y a, mais il me semble qu’elle répond à la commande de l’éditeur qui avait publié la Bienvenue” (168). Other scholars have also questioned her motives in this affair. Noiset makes a similar comment when asserting that Gournay had no pressing need to take part in the debate but the lies targeting the Jesuits pushed her to take their defense. Her
personal motivations, then, are what devastated her reputation during the intensely political aftermath of the monarch’s assassination, for “. . . il était pour le moins téméraire, surtout pour une femme, d’exprimer publiquement ses opinions sur le sujet” (Marie de Gournay 156). Claude-Gilbert Dubois conjectures that if Gournay were looking to maintain her presence at the Court, “la réussite en fut douteuse, et elle même se plaignit dans les Advis (1634) où elle fut reléguée après 1610” (481). The most likely answer is simply that Gournay was in need of recognition and she hoped to obtain the same good graces from the Regent that she had previously been accorded from the king. What stands out in Adieu is not a strong commitment to religious conviction, but a violent reaction to calumny.

A brief analysis of Adieu is in order to better contextualize the attacks of Gournay that follow it. The piece is a two part pamphlet addressed to Marie de Médicis with the defense of Jesuits constituting over half of the work. In the second part, she presents herself as Henri’s oracle, transmitting his advice from heaven to the Regent so that she may wisely educate their son. The political and social turmoil following the regicide is felt in the opening of the piece. A sense of urgency is created with its brusque introduction of the tale of Prometheus who neglected to sculpt man with a window, an image of transparency, so that others could identify lies:

Madame, Quand Momus reprit l’erreur de Prométhée (ce dit la fable) pour n’avoir fait une fenêtre au sein de l’homme, afin qu’on vist ce que sa pensée peut couver de contraire à sa parolle; Je m’estonne qu’il ne le

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reprit aussi, de n’avoir mis quelque ferme bride, ‘Et plusieurs freins, avec plusieurs timons’, à sa langue, et son oreille; parties d’abus si proclive et si pernicieux au prochain . . . Et trouve quant à moy bien plus Canibale, et vrayment Anthropophage, celuy qui par l’oreille ou par la langue . . . devore l’honneur des premiers venus, pleins de vie de de sentiment” (1: 194-95) 119.

The opening here is in marked contrast to the beginning of Égalité, addressed to another queen, the young Anne of Austria: “Madame, Ceux qui s’adviserent de donner un Soleil pour devise au feu Roy vostre Pere . . . rendirent la devise hereditaire en vostre Majesté presageans vos Vertus, lumiere et felicité des Peuples” (1: 962). Gournay gives neither praise of Marie de Médicis, the new Regent, nor does she present her condolences. Instead, her text appears to erupt in a spirited attack of slander, in general, and its cannibalistic nature. She knows from experience that the wounds suffered from “the tongue and the ear” are the worst that one can endure.

Gournay then launches into a long plea, full of digressions, in favor of the Jesuits who are “de moeurs et d’esprit plus haut, que le commun du monde” (1: 194). She counters every attempt to implicate the order in the king’s assassination: the Jesuits are a humble, simple order, persecuted by Spain and not the instruments of some Spanish plan to take over France. Gournay even dares to venture into an aside on the quality of France’s diplomats:

Il faut dire que nos Ambassadeurs sont mal servis en espies, de n’avoir de leur costé rien descouvert en Espagne de telles tram es, depuis si long temps qu’on les tympanise: eux qui sans advis prealable, doivent éventer une éguille au fonds d’un fleuve, s’elle nous veut piquer. (1: 197)

119 This verse is from Sophocles, Tragicorum Groecorum Fragmenta, n. 785. For other references of this source cited by Gournay, see Arnould (1 : 193 Note D)
On the contrary, in Spain the Jesuits do not even have the privilege of confessing the king as they do in France, so they cannot possibly be involved in an international plot on behalf of the King of Spain.

Even though Gournay was Parisian born and raised there most of her life, she refers to her ties to Picardy to excuse her audacity: “Excusez mon jargon estranger, MADAME, nourrie que je suis en Picardie, je ne scay guere de bon François, encore moins scay-je à la verité de Latin” (1: 199). Gournay is not above manipulating her origins. She uses her period of rural isolation as a justification for her lack of formal education, conscious as she is of how her public stance will appear. This excuse echoes a statement in Bienvenue: “Puis à vray dire toute incivilité me doibt estre pardonnée, venant si creue du village, ou du coin de mon feu, que je ne scay comme la civilité s’appelle” (1: 180). Her confession of ignorance here serves to underscore one of the driving forces in her work and life – her agonizing sensitivity to her situation as a woman advocating policies. Venesoen (Textes 8) comments on this sensitivity, going so far as to say that there is something “viscéral” in Gournay’s reaction to everything she perceives, justly or unjustly, as slanderous. He then compares her aggressiveness to an overreactive feminism “guettant toute parole, tout geste, qui pourraient être interprétés comme des camouflets ou des préjugés. Mais à une époque où une femme de lettres, érudite de surcroît, était toujours suspecte aux yeux des doctes, on comprend aisément que Marie de Gournay ait quelque peu souffert de paranoia.”

The perceived slander in Adieu is not based on a feminist’s paranoia but, instead, takes its source in the “brutal commun” that has turned upon the Jesuits. Gournay
contextualizes the persecution of sages, saying the “Philosophiques, ont esté, sont et seront toujours heurtées du vulgaire. Sa veue estant si stupide . . . le commun par coustume et routine, sottes comme nées de sots . . . Un honneste homme pardonne bien une bestise, un sot ne pardonne pas une sagesse” (1: 200). The condemnation of common opinion is similar to what is put forth in “Des Broquarts” and “Antipathie des ames basses et hautes.” The pages that follow this passage, though, all make Gournay a target for pamphleteers as she implies that it is the Huguenots who have mounted the affair by spreading rumors against the Jesuits, their longtime enemies. She gives a spirited *apologia* of Mariana’s *De rege*: “Mais Jesus, MADAME, que veulent dire les Huguenots, quand ils crient contre Mariana, le disans par son Livre, bouttefeu de l’exécrable assassinat du Roy nostre tre-honnoré Seigneur, ou quand ils declament contre les Jesuistes innocens de son Livre?” (1: 201). The titles of other books that could have inspired Ravaillac are also brought to the Regent’s attention. Gournay emphasizes the nationalism of the French Jesuits who had written against Mariana, a Spaniard. After a variety of references to classical mythology, religious and secular texts, all highlighting victims of slander and ignorance, Gournay advances that Ravaillac had never even heard of Mariana: “En vérité de Dieu, MADAME, . . . je jugéay que le meurtrier l’avoir faict, non seulement sans Mariana, mais de son propre movement . . . c’est à dire par pure forcenerie ou generale, ou particuliere, telle qu’est l’humeur ypocondriaque ou Lunatique, et qu’estoit celle de l’assassin” (1:215). The king’s death was not due to a conspiracy, the reader learns, but the makings of a lone assassin, a deranged individual. At the end of this first part, a summary of the arguments in defense of the Jesuits is given,
serving to clarify her arguments after the numerous asides taken elsewhere: the Jesuits were charitable, they had no reason to want to see a new monarch in France, no link between the community of French Jesuits and Spain had been proven and finally Ravaillac had no knowledge of Latin, the language of Mariana’s book.

The second part of the pamphlet is not what sets off the degrading comments on her person, but it is more relevant from the point of view of Gournay’s self-fashioning and self-promotion. The reader is projected to the scene of the crime, with Ravaillac about to strike the king, (“O meurtrier parricide!” 1: 219) The scene is told through Gournay’s eyes as she uses flashbacks to recall the king’s past triumphs and glories as the knife is about to fall. After a word of consolation to the people of France, Gournay offers the Regent several mottos in Latin to describe her eternal love. The mottos which rely on images of moons and the sun, seem to wake the king in his heavens. “Il me semble que je l’oy MADAME, qui vous escrire du supreme ciel” (1: 226). Gournay, as the king’s chosen voice on Earth, advises the Regent on the prince’s education which should be based on good books, justice and prudence. “Restablis les Lettres; et pour l’honneur d’elles mesmes, et parce que c’estoit mon dessein” (1: 229). The Regent is told to maintain good relations with her neighbors and to always seek counsel before acting. As the King has faith in Marie de Médicis, she can use “la glose et l’amplification” to expand on these last words of wisdom (1: 230).

Gournay spares no rhetoric to advance her causes. Through the use of prosopopoeia, she crafts her own vision of the ideal institution of the prince, one where decisions are made based on sound advice from those instructed in a humanist tradition.
Dubois describes the setting as one where the prince is in fact a princess. This new power structure “autorise une forme d’intimité entre femmes, avec ce ton particulier lié à une réalisation par une femme d’un ideal politique” (486). It is clear in the closing statements of *Adieu* that Gournay is seeking patronage with the request that the Regent honor those whom the king had honored, namely, the Jesuits. But as the king had recently invited Gournay to attend Court, the suggestion to honor those the king had, obviously includes herself. What directly follows this advice supports this inference. Gournay explains how she was introduced to the king and that he was not duped by the vicious stories that demeaned her person. She hopes that her “Majesté fera de mesme, pour ne vouloir que soub en ombre de ma mauvaise fortune…que tell’s diseurs ne peuvent croire se trouver en femme de saine teste” (1: 231). She then appeals to the queen as a woman and suggests that she reform the attitudes of the Court which does not hold women in very high esteem:

Toute forme saine et forte, est ridicule et rebutée en nostre temps, et rebutée aux femmes, jusques à l’outrage s’elles ne sont redoutées, parce que l’exemple de leur sexe, sur lequel on les veut attacher, est quelque degree plus bas que le masculin, qui l’est déjà lui-mesme extremement et l’est particulièrement en une Cour, et Cour Françoise: ce qui peut estre arrivé, MADAME, à fin que vous ayez plus de gloire à la reformer soubst vostre regne. (1: 231)

It was not uncommon for writers and artists to ask for pensions. In addition to her request, however, Gournay boldly appeals for social reform and adds her objections to sexual inequalities. This approach leads Noiset to ask rhetorically, “devons-nous lui en faire grief? . . . Il est en même temps osé et normal que Gournay, en tant que femme-écrivain, revendique sa juste part. Elle disposait de peu de moyens et essayait de vivre en
grande partie de sa plume” (Marie de Gournay 172). It was in Gournay’s nature to be bold for she could not have lived from her writing had she accepted the social norms of her time.

Adieu ends with a funeral oration. God is implored in the name of the mourning widow to have pity on the soul of the dead king. Gournay recalls the good deeds of Henri IV towards his people and enemies alike. The example of his conversion and his tolerance brought all of France back from the brink of heresy and hell. The prayer concludes with another image designed to move Marie de Médicis as it plays on the “topos du discours pathétique” (Arnould 1: 234 Note D). The Regent is not the determined educator, or strong-minded reformer, but becomes “la pauvre veufve ensevelie dans ses larmes, [avec ses] six petits enfans innocents, qui ne font que commencer d’apprendre à desnouer la langue.”

Until the final lines of the prayer, Gournay prays on behalf of the Regent. She then progresses beyond the role of the go-between and translator to unite with the Regent, forming a bond, symbolized by her hands that she folds together in prayer: “tandis que pour accomplir nostre oraison nous supplions à mains jointes ta bonté sacrée, de leur vouloir désormais server de l’un et l’autre” (1: 235 my emphasis). In this sacred gesture, she elevates herself to the level of the Regent with whom she shares common beliefs and griefs.

Gournay’s fears and sorrow after the king’s death were deeply felt for very personal reasons. After civil wars and financial turmoil, she had placed great hopes in her

120 In 1610, Louis XIII was nine years old and Henriette-Marie one.
newly found protection from Henri IV. At his death she was at a complete loss for her livelihood and was moved to approach the Regent. Editorial pressure, intellectual privilege, royal recognition or a personal obligation to defend honor and probity, these combined factors made the stakes too high for Gournay not to want to arbitrate in this affair. Very quickly Gournay’s perspicuity of the Jesuit question became debatable and the outcome she had hoped for would be dashed. As was the case in the 1595 preface of the *Essais*, she did not anticipate the virulent reactions to her text and she subsequently removed the passages from *Adieu* which specifically defended the Jesuits. They were never again published until the twentieth century. What is most remembered about *Adieu* by following generations is not Gournay’s reasoned, erudite defense but the parody which countered it, *Remerciment*.¹²¹

This satire’s primary target is Courbouzon who had written a response to the *Anti-Coton* paper condemning the Jesuits. Even though Gournay has a small role in the piece, it also comes to be known as l’*Anti-Gournay* due to her terribly demeaning portrayal. *Remerciment* summarizes the arguments against the Jesuit community under the anonymous authorship of the buttermaids of Paris who write Courbouzon to thank him for his defense. As Courbouzon’s text is worthless and nobody wants to read it, they can

¹²¹ This pamphlet is catalogued under the title *Remerciment des Beurrières de Paris, au sieur de Courbouzon Montgommery*, but is also referred to as l’*Anti-Gournay* by, among others, Ilsley (118) and Venesoen (*Textes* 9). The title on the first page of the text itself reads *Lettres de Créance de la communauté des Beurrières de la Ville, Cité, & Université de Paris, au Sieur de Courbouzon Montgommery*. Du Perron mistakenly calls it *Défense des Beurrières* (264) as Bayle points out (186 Note C). Henceforth referred to as *Remerciement*. 
use it as scrap paper to wrap up the pieces of butter they sell. *Remerciement* is heavy with bawdy sarcasm:

> Pour n’en demeurer ingrates, nous avons depute vers vostre tant liberal excellence, La Dame Marguerite Bas des fesses, dicte la grosse Margot, assistée d’autres notables Beurrieres, pour vous faire de nostre part les remercimens condignes & proportionnez à vos bien-faits, nous estans confiees à sa suffisance, à laquelle nous vous prions d’adjouster autant de foy & de creance, que si toutes en propres personnes vous estions allé faire la reverence, Prians Dieu. (86)

Gournay’s name is irremediably linked with *Remerciement* in the text’s opening paragraph where the buttermaids thank Courbouzon for his support of the “Peres Jesuistes, que suivant la trace & les memoires de la Dameselle de Gournay, qui a tousjours bien servi au public [il a] fait publier depuis huit jours en ça” (86). A woman who “has always served the public well” is, in clear, a prostitute. Despite the outrageous nature of this claim, for a woman to have her name linked to a prostitute was publicly humiliating. Adrien Baillet’s description of the anti-Coton proceedings, *Des satyres personnelles* (1689), exhibits more respect for decency when speaking of the different participants. He tells of those who spoke out in favor of the Jesuits, by name, but refrains from mentioning Gournay, even though his readers most certainly knew to whom he was referring. “Il y eut une Femme de ce nombre, mais on se contente de l’appeler Amazone sans la nommer” (146). Although this term was less sexually demeaning than “public woman,” being called an “amazon” was not flattering. It typically refers to a woman who displays male attributes, such as courage: “Femme de courage masle & guerrier” (*Dictionnaire de L’Académie francaise*). By using this round about method of including Gournay, Baillet is more interested in protecting his own reputation as a gentleman than
he is of Gournay’s name. No matter how preposterous the claims of sexual behavior are, a woman’s virtue is always an easy target when wanting to discredit her. This objective is undeniable in the case of Gournay when she becomes a subject of farces which rely on gross exaggerations and deformations of her character for the purpose of eliciting laughter which, in turn, becomes a mechanism of public disciplining.

**Damoiselle Carabine**

Gournay appears to be in collusion with Father Coton twice in *Remerciment*. The “Damoiselle Carabine,” as she is referred to (92), responds to Coton’s request for help and quickly uses up all of her available powder in his defense. Later in the text (98) “la pucelle de Gournay” acts as a go-between for Father Coton to hand off allegations, against the Lutherians and Huguenots, to Courbouzon. As Venesoen indicates, it is hard to believe though that there was any relationship between Coton and Gournay: “On constate une fois de plus que l’auteur du libelle implique Marie de Gournay dans une complicité avec le Père Coton, ce qui est, répétons-le, très peu probable” (*Textes* 98 Note 45).

Following a passage in which Courbouzon’s style is attacked, characterized as brutish, so rough and harsh that “tel qui s’en est voulu server de mouchoir au pays bas s’en est trouvé tout escorché par l’hui de derriere,” (89) Gournay appears again:

Il est bien vray que depuis nagueres ils se sont presentez quelques mal habiles gens qui ont voulu entreprendre sur vos marches, & vous desrober vostre chalandize, comme un certain Peletier, & la Damoiselle de Gournay, pucelle de cinquante cinq ans, qui s’y sont meslez de publier des defenses pour les Jesuistes, comme ayant interest en la cause sous preteste qu’ils ont esté r’appellez & restablis à la poursuite, brigue, & sollicitude
First of all, Gournay is portrayed as lacking quality as a writer. Gournay, and along with Pelletier, another defender of the Jesuits, she is “mal habiles.” The fact she is unmarried is mentioned in the same phrase as her supposed old age. Age in women being another easy target, Gournay’s longevity serves as another focal point for her detractors and will continue to do so in most satirical pieces. Yet as Bayle will point out in defense of Gournay in 1720, she was only forty-five in 1610 and not fifty-five (188). Her marital situation is also a source of much jesting that goes to intimidate her and undermine her credibility. A woman at the time needed to be under the protection and guidance of a father or husband. Gournay had neither and so she was viewed as being out of the norm for women, and thus an easy subject for satirists. The expression “sollicitude du postillon general de Venus” is rather odd. Venesoen remarks that “general spittle” is only a slightly disguised reference to the head of the Jesuits and that other texts from 1610 characterized the order as lewd and devoted to Venus. He cites from Recit des Desseins les plus secrets des Jesuites: “lesquels [the Jesuits] s’adonnoyent si brutallement à la paillardise, que T. Live raconte que le Senat redoutant l’ire des Dieux, ruina de fonds en comble ce bourdeau-là” (Textes 89 Note 21).

Sexual allusions were perhaps not the most painful criticism for Gournay. Being grouped with the rabble, “ceste racaille,” is arguably the most despicable and shameful insult of all as Gournay always set herself above le Vulgaire, le Peuple, le Commun. In Adieu, the ordinary person has no ability to think and if one could think, “il ne
manqueroit jamais de l’employer à mal” (1: 194). This theme is developed in all of Gournay’s writings and is the focus of Antipathie des ames basses et hautes (1626). In this essay, the “Vulgaire” is a “monster of foolishness” and associated with a madman. Gournay is so incensed with the insidious and destructive nature of common opinion that she must “escrire et rescrire à chaque feuille de mes Traictés” (1: 775). Remerciment was devastating to the point that she sought to have it retracted. But as Lacroix commented (4) in his analysis of mystifiers and their targets, “la pauvre victime de la plaisanterie n’avait pas le droit de se fâcher.” And indeed this is true in the case of Gournay’s appeal for it led to even further discussion of the affair by those, such as the Cardinal du Perron, for whom she had great esteem.

**L’Eminentissime Cardinal Du Perron and the “stroller”**

Gournay’s admiration for Du Perron can be measured by her numerous favorable references to him throughout her work. She respected his langage usage, his translations of Virgil and his own high regard of Ronsard whose eulogy he gave in 1586. Gournay writes of Du Perron in Bien-Venue de Monsieur le Duc d’Anjou (1: 167) and Traicté sur la poësie (1: 239-40) and he is also prominent in Advis, figuring in seventy-six different chapters, including four essay titles: “De la façon d’escrire de Messieurs l’Eminentissime Cardinal Du Perron et Bertaut Illustrisseme Evesque de Sées” (2: 1524), “A Monseigneur L’Eminentissime Cardinal Du Perron” (2: 1579), “Fin de la Version de l’Eminentissime Cardinal Du Perron” (2: 1582), “Fin de la Traduction de
l’Eminentissime Cardinal Du Perron” (2: 1681). It is precisely Gournay’s veneration for the cardinal that make his degrading asides on her character all the more poignant.

Cardinals held the title “Eminence” by papal decree, a title Gournay reverently uses. In Du Perron’s mémoires, Perroniana (1667), Gournay appears in striking contrast to the title respect she had accorded him, becoming a “stroller” and a subject of public mockery. He writes (264) about a conversation he had with Pelletier who had chanced upon Gournay on her way to petition the “Lieutenant-Criminel” to prohibit the publication of Remerciment.122 As later brought out by Bayle (206) the prohibition of books was a duty of the “lieutenant-civil.” By substituting “criminel” for “civil,” Du Perron makes Gournay appear as if she had taken the joke too seriously; accusing her of having no sense of humor is in effect a succinct dismissal of the very grounds of her argument. Du Perron also relays the passage about Gournay having served the public, the most scandalous part of Remerciment where her honor is concerned. He goes on, as if the implications were not clear enough, that Gournay was called a “stroller,” “une coureuse,” in the pamphlet, a term which does not in fact even appear in the text.123 Pelletier adds to the slander with a play on the word “saisir” – literally “to seize” but also “to submit or refer a case to court – by saying that few would want to take the pains of seizing Gournay. If she wants to prove she has not served the public, Pelletier adds, Gournay needs only to have her portrait put on the cover of her book: “Il [Pelletier] dit, je crois

122 Du Perron calls the pamphlet Defense des Beurrieres. See note 118 above.
123 “Coureuse” is the translation from The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr Peter Bayle ed. Pierre Des Maizeaux (1734; London: Routledge, 1997).
que le Lieutenant n’ordonnera pas qu’on la prenne au corps, il s’en trouveroit fort peu qui
voudroient prendre cette peine, & pour ce qui est dit qu’elle a servi le Public, ç’a été si
particulièrement qu’on n’en parle que par conjecture, il faut seulement que pour faire
croire le contraire, elle se fasse peindre devant son Livre” (264).

Gournay’s portrait, by Jean Mathieu, first appears in *Les Advii ou les Presens de
la Demoiselle de Gournay* in 1634, more than a quarter of a century before *Perroniana*
was published posthumously. It is unknown whether Gournay was following Pelletier’s
mocking advice or that he had made the comment to her directly, or even at all. This
could simply be the case of a running joke for him, considering that he had made a
similar remark to another woman. As Du Perron (264) reports, Helene de Surgeres had
once voiced to Pelletier her concern about the gossip over her relationship with Ronsard,
and he had suggested that she have her portrait accompany an edition of his works to
prove the contrary. Yet Du Perron chooses, as do many others, to recount details of the
regrettable events surrounding the publication of *Adieu*, thereby perpetuating its negative
images of Gournay. In addition, he amplifies certain points of Pelletier’s discussion,
appropriating it as his own, or at a minimum, showing his agreement with the content of
the mockery. The affair surrounding Gournay’s defense of the Jesuits constitutes the
extent of Du Perron’s sketch of Gournay.

His portrayal is all the more deplorable given that she considered him a friend.
Noiset recalls this entry in *Perroniana* saying that the cardinal “s’abaissa même à se
moquer du physique de l’écrivaine, alors qu’elle s’approchait des 70 ans.” (“Marie de
Gournay” 199). Du Perron’s intent in including her in his work is not necessarily to elicit
laughter at Gournay’s expense, but a means of showing his own allegiance with those who have the power to reward and punish behavior. It is all together likely that the fallout from her defense of the jesuits precipitated the long chain of farcical anecdotes that would forever fetter Gournay’s literary production from a more serious and extensive analysis. As Boase (53) likewise comments it was perhaps with *Remerciment* that “the tradition of baiting her began.” Her lawsuit to have *Remerciment* banned was summarily dismissed, causing Gournay to fear the loss of her social standing and benefactors even more.

**Parodies in Poetry and Prose**

Gournay’s persona, as it was created by satirists and critics of her time, remained entrenched long after many of the anecdotes discussed here were forgotten. In 1891, when Brunot wrote *La Doctrine de Malherbe*,¹²⁴ he summed up the perception of many generations of critics. After his own condescending reference to “la pauvre sybille,” he ends his commentary on her by supposing that “elle finit par consentir à corriger Montaigne, bien légèrement il est vrai. Néanmoins c’était abdiquer” (556). Brunot painted her last days as solitary ones where she was alone with her memories of Montaigne, having renounced her mission. This does not appear to be the case. The last edition of the *Essais* published under Gournay’s supervision dates from 1635. After this date she worked exclusively on her own texts, editing *Advis* for their final publication in

1641, seven years after her work on the *Essais*. From 1642 to 1644, she published compilations of poetry, some of her own composition. Brunot’s version of her life appears as yet another fabrication, a retrospective attempt to mold her into submission.

**Saint Amant’s “Poët crotté”**

In 1633 Cardinal Richelieu intervenes in Gournay’s behalf to ban thirty-four verses of “Le Poët Crotté,” by Saint Amant, a founding member of the French Academy. These verses remain suppressed or modified until 1641. “Le Poët crotté” is arguably the best satirical piece of literature written about Gournay. According to Tallemant’s *Historiettes* (380), it was Boisrobert who introduced Gournay to Richelieu:

> Boisrobert la mena au cardinal de Richelieu, qui lui fit un compliment tout de vieux mots qu’il avait pris dans son Ombre. Elle vit bien que le Cardinal voulait rire: “Vous riez de la pauvre vieille”, dit-elle, “Mais riez, grand genie; il faut bien que tout le monde contribue à vostre divertissement”.

This is the most well-known account of the Cardinal and Gournay’s first meeting, which probably took place between 1630 and 1632 (Fogel 365 Note 72), even though they had undoubtedly seen each other during the regency of Marie de Médicis. Richelieu was sufficiently impressed with Gournay to honor her wishes to restrict Saint Amant’s poem. He also offered her the use of a carriage which she thanked him for in a letter dated 16 June 1634 (2: 1943). The obvious identification of Gournay as the model for the
grotesque “Perrette” was unacceptable for Richelieu who appreciated her sense of humor.\textsuperscript{125}

The “muddy poet,” a “satyre joyeuse” as the author refers to it (209), makes light of mediocre poets who must figuratively, if not literally, walk the dirty streets of Paris begging for handouts. Saint Amant asks that those who see themselves in this poem not be offended. His true intention is to amuse the Duc de Retz.\textsuperscript{126} “Puis qu’on tient pour chose certaine / Que, pour appaiser toute peine, / Le plaisir est un appareil / Qui n’a nul remede pareil” (210). The portrait of the muddy poet is one of filth and disgust: lice are growling in his collar, his teeth are bared in pain; his rotting feet are shod with two different styles of boots. The poet’s nighttime walk through Paris to say his goodbyes to the city is the pretext to poke fun at all types of people he encounters. The poet’s boundless loves turns to derision when he arrives at “Perrette’s” window:

\begin{verbatim}
Gente Perrette, mon soucy,  
A qui, jeunet, d’amour transy,  
J’abandonnois moy-mesme en proye  
Mon coeur, mon poulmon et mon foye,  
Mon corps de l’un à l’autre bout,  
Trippes, boudins et merde et tout… (228)
\end{verbatim}

The muddy poet reminds Perrette that this poem is all in jest and that she has been the object of many other tales, both oral and written, that make fun of her body and her intellect:

\textsuperscript{125} Jean Lagny, Introduction, \textit{Oeuvres}, by Antoine Gérard de Saint-Amant, eds. Jacques Bailbé and Jean Lagny vol. 2 (Paris: Didier, 1967-1979) i-xxviii. Lagny confirms (xvi) that Gournay was the model for Perrette in this piece.

\textsuperscript{126} When “Poët Crotté” was composed, Saint Amant was in the services of Henri de Gondi, Duc de Retz (Lagny x).
Ce vray demon de la satyre,  
Né pour nostre commun martyr,  
A dit de bouche ou par escrit  
De ton corps et de ton esprit,  
Tantost accompanant ta mine  
A quelque vache qui rumine,  
Tantost chantant qu’un siecle entier  
A greslé dessus ton quartier;  
Tantost, t’appelant vieille chatte  
Poil de gorret, caboche platte,  
Nez roupieux, oeil esraillé  
Bec de pivert, teint escaillé . . . (230).

The poem continues with other distorted images of Perrette’s physical characteristics until the reader is clued into the true identity of the muddy poet’s lover. “Tantost, disant que de Virgile / Tu honnis l’adorable stile, / Que son beau sens perverty as / Avec ton galimathias” (230). From 1594 to 1634 Gournay published a number of translations of Latin authors, namely Virgil, as well as Montaigne’s citations in the Essais. By 1633 Gournay embraces her authorial status and like one of her heroic figures, she too would rather die than give up her writing: “Encores est-ce quelque chose, de ce se tuer d’un beau cousteau” (2: 1579) she maintains, when justifying her taking possession of authors of the Pleiades.

Saint Amant’s allusions to Gournay, though, are too apparent for a woman struggling to define herself socially in an arena, and in a time, where there was very little room for maneuver. To be sure, the next verses leave no doubt as to their referent:

J’ay publiquement defenue  
Ains pieça, los, jaçoit, ardu  
Soulas, opter, blandice, encombre;  
Et, m’escrimant, ainsi qu’une ombre,  
Dans mes discourse superlatives,  
Pour les mignards diminutives
Ay prouvé par raisons notoires
A tous les porteurs d’escritoires,
Que, comme de mil vient millet,
Ainsi de mail vient ton Maillet,
Nom dont, par une prevoyance
De nos amours, c’est ma croyance…
Ha! Ma vieillottine Perrette! (232)

It is Gournay’s defense of diminutives that provides Saint Amant with a name for her lover: Marc-Antoine de Maillé (c. 1568-1628) who was a court poet and involved in a number of quarrels due to his own belligerent character. He was banished from the court of Queen Marguerite several times and each time pardoned, before falling into permanent disgrace.

Saint Amant displays a more poetic flair in the last part of “Le poët crotté”:

Belle, qui dans un grabat
Sans rabat,
Toute seule et toute nue,
Estens à present ton corps,
Si ne dors,
Las! Oy ma desconvenue.
Oy le triste ver-coquin
D’un mesquin
Sur qui Cupido s’acharne,
Et pour obliger son feu
Tant soit peu,
Mets le chief à la lanterne…. (233-34)

Gournay hardly appears here as the language ghost from bygone times as she does in other farcical depictions. Indeed, Fogel is right to refer to the melodic gentleness and mocking eroticism of this ballad as being “la forme la plus élaborée de tous les écrits ou de tous les ‘bons mots’ colportés oralement qui ont répandu des obscenités sur cette ‘Fille d’alliance’” (15). Yet Saint Amant is not looking to construct an exact portrait of
Gournay, and one verse does not correspond to Gournay at all: “Par ton mary qui fut pendu . . . ”. Poetic license allows this liberty he takes with wit and it also allows, although somewhat feebley, for some plausible deniability as to the identity of the gente Perrette. For Saint Amant, Gournay is not necessarily a target based on the causes she defends, her age or even her sex; she is a curiosity for her contemporaries, an *originale*, a social abnormality to be mocked.

In “Le Poët crotté” Gournay’s characteristics are amplified, distorted, made grotesque to amuse readers. Even as Lagny asserts that Gournay did not at all deserve the crude mockery of Saint Amant, he defends the merit of the poem: “C’est une pièce remplie de verve, et un document fort intéressant par les tableaux qui s’y succèdent du Paris d’alors” (XVII). Gournay qualifies as a target for Saint Amant, and others, simply for standing out, for pushing the structuring mechanisms of culture too far, too fast and in too many directions at the same time.

**Rien propre pour l’amour: Mainard’s “Contre une dame”**

François Mainard (1583?-1646) was another poet who integrated Gournay into his poetry for the purpose of mocking her. Seventeenth-century poetry entitled “satire” or “satirique” played largely on sexual transgressions and boldly disrespectful characterizations of all types of people. Often, the same anonymous works reappeared in different editions and under different titles. This fluid circulation of transgressive works was possible because the number of readers remained very limited. DeJean shows how “obscene material could be seen as an insider joke to be shared among like-minded men,
an audience not likely to be corrupted by the content of what it read” (The Reinvention 7).

“Contre une dame qui disoit qu’elle n’en avoit point,” from the collection Le Cabinet Satyrique,\textsuperscript{127} was first published anonymously due to its bawdy, irreverent depictions of notables and fellow writers before being attributed to Mainard. The poems in this collection may have been circulating as early as 1618, as an 1864 subtitle suggests.\textsuperscript{128} Gournay is but one of many objects of derision as some of the various titles illustrate: “Lise, cette insigne punaise” (51), “Madame, vostre con est brave et docte escolle” (74), “Contre une vieille riche” (276), “Margot, la vieille édentée” (283). Men are also objects of mockery but when women figure in the poems, common misogynist themes such as sexual excess, age, vanity and physical beauty are prime targets.

Mainard, another founding member of the French Academy, became secretary to Marguerite de Valois at the fairly young age of twenty-five and it was at l’Hôtel de Sens, her residence, where he undoubtedly met Gournay to whom Marguerite attributed fifty crowns a trimester.\textsuperscript{129} L’Hôtel de Sens was known as a refuge for people of letters. Marguerite’s love of the arts and literature occasioned meetings and debates with a number of prominent writers. Benefactors of Gournay were among them, for example, the Duc de Nevers et de Mantua and the Maréchal Pierre de Bassompierre. She credited

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{128} The subtitle reads \textit{Nouvelle edition complete, revue sur les editions de 1618 et 1620 et sur celle du Mont-Parnasse, sans date}. A 1700 version has the title “Ode. Sur une Dame qui n’avait point de C..” (423).
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Both Charles Drouhet in \textit{Le Poète François Mainard} (1909; Genève: Slaktine Reprints, 1981) 42 and Fogel (161) speak of Gournay’s pension.
\end{itemize}
Bassompierre for her meeting and subsequent patronage of King Henri IV (Ilsley 100) and became friends with the family of the Duc de Nevers. His son’s tutor was the father of Michel de Marolles who later became one of Gournay’s best friends (Fogel 280). Gournay then had some of the same circles of friends as did Mainard making her disillusionment and anger are all the more comprehensible as she must have felt betrayed by her acquaintances.

Satirical poetry of the period relied on broad vulgarities and degrading metaphors. “Contre une dame” is no different. The preposition, “against,” or “in opposition to,” in the title of Mainard’s text replaces the typical “for” or “to” found in celebratory poems and sets disobligeing tone for what is to follow.

Mon crayon qui manqué de grace  
Qu’il faut bien peindre face  
Que l’aage et le sort on dompté  
Refuseroit de l’entreprendre  
S’il n’estoit asseuré de rendre  
L’art vaincu par la vanité

The imagery draws on age and fate which have taken their toll on the “lady” who nevertheless remains vain. She is referred to as a mule-like, presumptuous and defective in the ways of love, figuratively and literally: “Puis qu’on dit qu’elle n’en a point.” The implication is a base assault on the person of Gournay and we see that Mainard respected no boundaries of decorum or taste in his search of humor. He continues with more elevated metaphors of soldiers going to battle without weapons and unmanned ships at sea. “C’est un soldat sans son espee / C’est une nef non équipée / Qui veut tenir le large en mer;” He ends, as he does each stanza, with idiocies. “C’est un fort sans garde
guerrière, / C’est un cheval sans croupière, / C’est un chatré qui veut aymer.” The content of course has absolutely nothing to do with Gournay. Mainard, as was the case with Saint Amant, is in search of laughter through rhymes and disjointed imagery.

Mainard finishes “Contre une dame” with another degrading stanza:

Bref, pour conclure son histoire,
Elle est fort propre en une foire,
Non pas pour server aux gens de cours,
Mais pour garder une boutique,
D’autant qu’elle est paralytique
Et n’a rien propre pour l’amour.

The wit comes from Mainard’s play on words of “foire,” and “propre” which refer to respectively, a market and how the lady of the poem keeps her stand. One cannot read these verses, though, and not think of the scatological undercurrent. “Foire” can also mean “diarrhea,” thus, rendering the humor of the last line not only simplistic but licentious. Among the definitions Furetière gives, there is: “Grand marché public, où on vend toutes sortes de Marchandises . . . Cours de ventre. Avoir la foire. des fruits qui donnent la foire. Foirer. v. n. Se decharger des excrements fluides qui font le cours de ventre . . .”. In addition, as Arnould (1: 940 Note B) explains, the double meaning comes from similar pronunciations at the time of “foire,” from Latin, feria, meaning festival, and of “foire,” from Latin, foria, meaning diarrhea. If “Contre une dame” was written after 1626, the word “foire” could possibly be an allusion to Sur la Version des antiques, ou des Metaphors where Gournay makes a scathing attack on the ignorance of women in their remarks on language.

…allez dire aux Dames, qu’elles se vantent d’aller à la “Foire” sans équivoquer criminellement: priez-les qu’elles parlent de la Mer de Calais
et de Marseille, puis qu’il faudroit commencer par deux tells monosyllables, que ce “Mer” et ce “de”, qui se pourroient joindre en nos oreilles…(1:940)

It is more likely though that both Mainard and Gournay were commenting – in their own ways – on the ascending role some women were playing in the purification of French. Mainard does not limit himself to social commentary and licentious humor, though, but crosses the line to obscene poetry in another poem with a crude allusion to Gournay and Montaigne: “À bien calculer son âge / Elle peut avoir foutu / Avec ce grand personage” (Ilsley 171). “Satirical” poetry did cause much consternation in the first half of the seventeenth century, especially when the question of the relationship between morality and authorial license became an issue in censorship cases. Gournay’s reputation, however, had long since been damaged and censorship issues would have no impact on repairing it.

**Beyond jest: “Tit, fils de Vesp”**

The last example of poetry written at Gournay’s expense comes from Tallemant’s *Historiettes* which will be discussed in more detail below. In his article on Gournay, Tallemant tells the story of how Moret, Bueil and Yvrande, looking to make fun of her, sent her the following poem:

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Tit, fils de Vesp, roi du rond heritage
Des peuples inchretiens qui casserent Carthage,
Prodiguoit rarement son amoureux empoix;
Mais il aimoit si for t les filles de science,
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Que la Gournay eust eu son auguste semence,
Il l’eust mesme titée au plus fort de ses mois. (379)

Making sport of Gournay’s poetry, erudition, or her deep attachment to literary traditions of the sixteenth century could be harmless enough, even flattering or endearing, as it would indicate that her work was recognized and that she had achieved a relative level of status among her contemporaries. But at least these objects of parody have the merit of addressing Gournay’s knowledge. The irreverence of the last two lines of the above poem, however, focuses on bodily functions and goes beyond the boundaries of jest as it concentrates on that which is exclusively female, menstruation, and the depiction of sexual relations during this time, something expressly forbidden by the Bible. 131 “Do not violate a woman by having sexual intercourse with her during her period of menstrual impurity” (Lev 18.19). Gournay’s own numerous, methodical citations of biblical passages underscore her exhaustive knowledge of the Fathers of the Church and their interdictions. This poem relied on her contemporaries’ acquaintance with the books of Leviticus and Ezekiel to be understood. There is no record of how Gournay actually received this poem, sent from the three “honorable” courtiers as a practical joke, but the debasing nature of its humor accentuates the constraining mechanisms to which she was subjected.

Gournay was not a prude, though, and there are some indications as to what she may have thought of “satirical” poetry in general. In a discussion about the use of

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131 Lev. 15.24, 20.18, and Ezek. 18.6, 22.10 also specifically prohibit sexual relations during menstruation.
mythology she speaks highly of the *Golden Ass* by Apuleius and Petronius’s *Satiricon* (2: 1279-80), and in doing so proved herself in advance of many generations of scholars who hesitated to examine these ancient stories. As late as 1940 some critics still felt the need to justify these works as valid subjects of scholarly research.\textsuperscript{132} She had studied Montaigne’s *Essais* (832; bk. 3 ch. 5), “Sur des vers de Virgile,” and his use of Ovid could not have left her indifferent: “\textit{adhuc ardens rigidæ tentigine vulvæ, / Et lassata viris, nondum satiate, recessit}” “La vulve tendue, encore brulante de chaleur, / Épuisée et non lasse, elle lassa les hommes.”\textsuperscript{133} Far from being offended by the subject, she decided to translate Virgil herself. Gournay, then, imbued as she was with Montaigne’s writings and with Latin and Greek culture in general, was undoubtedly not shocked by content of sexually explicit poetry and could even appreciate its use of language; but she was most definitely hurt by her own depictions in these satires.

\textbf{An ancient muse}

Parodies of Gournay found themselves in works of prose as well as verse. Louis Petit (1615-1693) wrote *Dialogues satyriques et moraux* (1687) which rely on unsophisticated humor, similar to that of Saint Évremont’s *Comédie*, to denounce the judgments of the Academy. The tale of Gournay is found in his “Dialogue XVIII, Le Poet

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{132} See Frederick Todd’s justification of his edition of these works. *Some Ancient Novels* (1940; Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1968) pages 65 and 140.
\textsuperscript{133} *Métamorphoses*, 6.128-29. Translated by Rat in Michel de Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes* eds. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: La Pléiade, 1962) 1629 Note 832.4.
\end{footnotesize}
Burlesque.” It appears some fifty years after Comédie and is only five pages long, leading to even less character development. The Academicians and Gournay are reduced to clown-like language zealots with “mines graves” who take great pains to determine if “raffinage” should officially be allowed into French. Gournay is presented as the “Muse antique,” the “vieille Sybille.” She is the burlesque poet who asks her servant to pronounce “raffinage” from across the room to test whether is sounds like good French from a distance. The tale ends with Gournay deciding that “‘il ne sonne pas mal à l’oreille.’ Il fut donc conclu que ce mot avait son passe-port” (329). What one can infer from this story, as ridiculous as it appears, is that it was common knowledge that some well known authors consulted Gournay about language matters and that they respected her opinion.

**Gournay’s slippers and Maillet’s boots**

Adrien de Montluc’s Les Jeux de l’inconnu is a take-off on classical texts of exemplum with the philosophy of the Ancients held up for the reader’s admiration and moral education. Montluc makes some edifying justifications for the works in the book that “n’ont rien du Satire” (A4). He claims that good actions and morals can be formed based on the content of the reading. All one must do is imitate good qualities and notice faults, so as not to follow them. “Nopces” is a colorful description of spring, a season of

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love and reproduction, “la saison que la flèche du Cupidon perce les armes de la troupe écaillée et que sa flame inévitable va meme échauffer le sang” (188). This piece is in fact a parody of Renaissance authors and their reflections on nature. After a stately opening, “Nopces” breaks with tradition to expound upon a series of ridiculous associations, one with sexual connotations: “La poire amoureuse du fromage l’emportera par le dessus le macarron, qui étant italien, on voudrait abuser à la mode de son pays” (190).

On the following page, Gournay appears. “Les bottes du sieur Maillet feront un excellent ménage avec les patins de Mlle de Gournay, à la charge que le dit sieur fournira un doüaire de dix mille écus vers, et la Dame le seul chapitre des diminutifs” (191). This observation plays on many of the jokes circulating about Gournay. First, Maillet makes another appearance after “Le Poët Crotté,” where he played Gournay’s forlorn lover. The mismatched boots he wore in Saint Amant’s poem are a perfect match for Gournay’s “patins.” The absurd match between mismatched boots and slippers are in fact another allusion to “Des diminutifs françois” which had been reprinted in *Les Advis* of 1634.

Nous faudra-t-il attiffer encores les pieds d’une Dame d’une moisson de perles, d’une ondée de frisons, et des fleurs exquises du blanc et du vermisson d’Espagne; Pource que nous en ajolivons sa teste et son visage? Ou ses pieds auront-ils meilleure grace avec de tells attours, que dans une simple paire de patins? (1: 1021).

Gournay used slippers as a symbol of simplicity in her defense of an essay which consists of lists of diminutives interspersed with condemnations of those who do not use them. It was not designed as a pretentiously pretty or polished object, she argues, but as a tool to be consulted when writing. However, during a period which valued refinement in manners and style it is understandable that Gournay’s essay was not characterized as
pleasant or uplifting. DeJean observes that when values of civility were promoted in France there was a concomitant condemnation of all that was unrefined. “The civilizing process is perhaps above all a monument to the significance of taboos” (The Reinvention 19). Again, it was Gournay’s contemptuous tone and her pointed attacks of her contemporaries’ emphasis on social refinement that exposed her to condemnation. Somewhat paradoxically, despite Gournay’s erudition, her style of writing and her general behavior were characterized as uncivilized by courtiers.

Another point of interest is the dowry of 10,000 crowns that Maillet is to furnish. As discussed above, Gournay’s financial difficulties began in the earlier 1600’s after the death of her mother. She was forced to sell the family’s properties and then justify her actions to her family. It was a fall from social grace that she would not surmount. The amount of 10,000 crowns would most definitely have contributed to a more secure standing. As a point of comparison, the Gournay-sur-Aronde property, including the different reimbursements due, would have cost her 70,000 pounds, a little over 23,000 crowns (Fogel 174). The sensitivity of questions on financial well-being made Gournay’s financial problems yet another source of interest for satirists.

Gournay’s last published poem was an epigram, “A maistre Adam, Menuisier de Nevers, sur ses Chevilles” (1644) in which she compares carpentry to poetry:

Vous Reigle, et vous Compas, qu’Adam transforme en plume,
Qu’un fiel de vain orgueil contre vos Vers ne fume:
Est-il dit qu’Apollon, Dieu qui se fit Bouvier,
N’ose sur un Poète enter un Menuisier? (2: 1914)
Gournay did not abandon her love of metaphorical language or mythological references, or her desire to publish. After *Advis*’ final publication Gournay was seventy-six years old, hardly the age to go out petitioning the “lieutenant civil.” Judging from her two testaments dated September 1642 and December 1644 and two codicils from March 1645, Gournay continued to manifest concern for her friends and her posterity, changing amounts and items to be distributed after her death. We also learn that she fell ill in December 1644 and was still suffering in March 1645, causing her notaries to witness the acts at her home. Brunot’s comment that her lack of public exposure in her last years shows that she “abdicated” smacks of bad faith. He too participates in the objectification and alienation of Gournay, showing himself to be one of Mary Daly’s “male-myth masters [who] fashion prominent and eminently forgettable images of women in their art, literature and mass media – images intended to mold women for male purposes” (3).

**FARCES AND THE FRENCH ACADEMY**

When the French Academy was officially founded in 1635 by cardinal Richelieu, its original “Statuts et Règlements” stated the purpose of its inception: “La principale fonction de l’Académie sera de travailler avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possible à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de

traiter les arts et les sciences." Prior to this date many informal meetings and debates had taken place to consider questions of language. Writers such as Conrart, Colletet and Gournay all hosted gatherings for their contemporaries to voice their opinions on linguistic theories. Some literary circles witnessed the staging of satires making light of the mission of an institutionalized academy which could govern language evolution. Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) later described these occasions where “la digne et respectable mademoiselle de Gournay . . . se borna donc à guerroyer pour Ronsard et les vieux . . . souvent avec raison et justice” (160). Fear of reprisals from Richelieu and his new Academy kept some works, such as Requête des Dictionnaires (1636), anonymous for years. The best known satires of the period are addressed in this section: Gille Ménage’s Requête, Antoine Gaillard’s La Furieuse Monomachie (1634), Rôle des présentations by Charles Sorel (1634) and Saint-Evremond’s Comédie des Académistes (1638). Most satires which targeted the Académie, while portraying Gournay’s adamant stances in favor of “les vieux,” do not neglect disparaging comments of her as a woman. These two themes constitute the basis for much of the humor in the farces discussed in this section.

“La Pucelle, cette sçavante damoiselle” : Ménage’s Requête

The first of four satires on the French Academy to be considered is Requête présentée par les dictionnaires à Messieurs de l'Académie pour la réformation de la

*langue française* by Gilles Ménage (1636). In this text in verse, members of the Academy hear the case of a Dictionary who speaks directly to them:

A Nosseigneurs Académiques,
Nosseigneurs les Hypercritiques,
Souverains arbitres des mots,
Doctes faiseurs d’avant-propos,
Cardinal-historiographes,
Surintendants des orthographes,
Raffineurs de locutions,
Entrepreneurs de version,
……………………………...
Banny des Romans, des poulets
Des Lettres douces, des billets,
Des Madrigaux, des Elegies,
Des Sonnets & des Comedies;
Ces nobles mots, moult, ains, jaçoit,
Ores, Adonc, Maint, Ainsi soit,
A tant, si que, piteux, icelle,
………………………………
Et que de Gournay la Pucelle
Cette sçavante Damoiselle,
En faveur de l’antiquité,
Eust nostre corps sollicité,
De faire des plaints publiques
Au decry de ses mots antiques. . . . (Aij-6)

*Requête* continues for another fifteen pages, evoking the passing of Ronsard, du Bellay and others. Ménage laments over the loss of thousands of words, changes in gender and the characterization of Latin as a “langage de Pedant” (11). He fears that French will become so impoverished that people will be forced to use sign language. The poem concludes with a plea to the Academy to abandon all projects; by doing nothing, they will serve the language well. Gournay was clearly not the only one to disapprove of the Academy’s proceedings.
Émile Magne twentieth-century narrative speaks of how even the king made a joke of the Academy: “le public avait accueilli la nouvelle de sa foundation par une risée générale. Le roi le premier s’en était gaussé.”

A number of authors voiced their opposition, such as Régnier, Camus, Pasquier. If Gournay holds positions similar to respected (male) voices of her time, her delivery is distinctive. Noiset, in her discussion of Gournay’s engagement in the language quarrel, states that “elle (Gournay) fut beaucoup plus vêhémentement dans ses protestations que les autres écrivains de son temps” (123). Indeed Camus’s reference to “esprits pedants” pales in comparison to Gournay’s repetitive invectives and to her demonstrative digressions. The only role she is given in the literary world at large is as the defender of outmoded words. Nowhere in her mises en scène do we find her dynamic displays of reason as when she forcefully calls out to the readers of her essays:

“Iray-je donc ouvrir un Livre, affîn d’y chercher un tel joyau que la parlerie de ces tendres Nymphes et de leurs mignardes Rueles, que vous nous proposez miroir, la trouvant si plantureusement chez elle? Non, non, je l’ouvre pour y rencontrer et recueillir quelque chose de nouveau, quelque chose en verité, qui passe leur portée et la mienne après, en intention d’essayer à relever mon esprit, et le fortifier sur celuy d’autrui.

(1: 1101)

She appeals to the reader to embrace the beauty of Ronsard’s odes, the nature of literature itself and the raison d’être for reading, that is, to elevate and strengthen the spirit.

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139 Noiset (122-125) gives a concise discussion of this point. She cites Camus who treated reformers as “Esprits pédants” whom, he suspected, wanted to “régenter l’Univers et y exercer une Pedagogie en forme d’empire.”
Of the four satires at hand, *Requête* is the least derogatory to the person of Gournay. The only one known to have voiced objections to Ménage’s piece was Boisrobert, explained Adam: “L’œuvre était bénigne . . . Le plaisant abbé trouva désagréable une allusion à son amour ‘pour le genre masculin.’” As a woman Gournay was barred from the deliberations of the Academy. Her outspokenness, though, was such an oddity for her time that her persona was included in the all the major satires to reflect common fears over the future of French. This caricature did not bode well for her reception. The oversimplifying nature of the satires reduced her to a curiosity, an *originale*, and thus the ideal target for mystification.

The “vieille folle” of Gaillard’s *Monomachie*

Antoine Gaillard, sieur de la Porteneille, was one of the first seventeenth-century authors to put contemporaries or groups of literary persons on stage when he wrote this short play in verse, *La Furieuse Monomachie*. He opens his piece by begging the reader not to be offended by his jesting, as he has no intention of causing any pain or grief to those portrayed in his drama. The five acts in *Monomachie* are pure farce. There is little intrigue among the exaggerated characters whose purpose is to convey spirited

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comments against authors of the time. The simplistic, trivial plot is summarized before the play begins. In his “Argument” for writing the play the author states:

Gaillard importuné de la quantité des vers que Braquemart luy enuoyoit chaque iour pour terminer la dispute que cette jalouzie d'escrire avoit cause entr’eux, consentit de convenir de quelque capable juge pour vuider ce differend, ils eurent beaucoup d’avis sur cela: En fin ils conuindrent de Neuf-Germain qui l’accepta, mais il voulut que Madamoiselle de Gourné assistast à ce jugement…ils sont contraints d’appeller Gouino qui donne le bouquet à Gaillard. (26)

The success of Monomachie in the early 1630’s is unknown. As Lancaster suggests, the theme of this light drama may not have even interested a popular audience and so if acted at all, “it found its audience at some noble or literary house” (502). The relevance of the play here is twofold. Not only is its portrayal of Marie de Gournay a building block in the construction of her persona, but her reflections of other notable poets, or rather those she is made to have, are revealing through a game of mirrors as to how society should perceive her.

When the story opens, Gaillard and Braquemart debate the qualities of possible arbitrators in their search for a judge. They name Corneille, Rotrou, Durier, Dorval and others as candidates but they all have notorious flaws which preclude them from intervening. They agree on Louis de Neufgermain (1574-1662), an egotistical and bizarre poet who styled himself as the “poète heteroclite de Monsieur.” In his signature poetry, his rhymes were based on the names of those he celebrated. Neufgermain agrees to mediate the disagreement: “Mon nom est estimé par tout cet Univers: / Je suis sans me flatter l’arbitre des bons vers / on peut bien me nommer la merveille des hommes . . .” (35). Neufgermain demands that they submit verses to “la sçavante” Gournay, leading the
reader to assume that she must be as odd as he: “Il luy faut déferer, c’est une vieille Muse./ S. Amand a grand tort, quand il l’appelle buse./ Montagne la iugea digne de ses amours” (39). As seen above, Saint Amant’s poem had been circulating for several years. He made many derogatory comparisons with Gournay but never referred to her by the term “buzzard,” a word used to refer to someone dim-witted: “On dit proverbialement d’un sot, d’un stupide . . . On dit aussi, qu'on ne sçauroit faire d'une buse un espervier, pour dire, qu'il y a des gens incapables de science et de discipline” (Furetière). By mentioning Saint Amant, he calls attention to the pejorative fun previously made about Gournay. Despite the stated intention of admonishing Saint Amant, Gaillard instead, by repeating and elaborating on “Le Poët crotté,” adeptly adds an insult of his own.

In Act IV scene 2, Gournay makes her first appearance, welcomed by Neufgermain: “Pucelle de mille ans, vieille Muse authentique / Sçavante jusqu’aux dents, sage Metaphysique” (40). In 1634 Gournay is sixty-nine years old and allusions to her age will not go unmentioned in any of her portrayals. Her knowledge of classic authors is unflatteringly juxtaposed with her teeth, another common ground for ridicule, as will be seen in Saint Evremont and Tallemant. In the deliberations of the rival poets she uses the words _jaçoit que_, “bien que,” _ores_, “maintenant,” _pieça_, “il y a longtemps”. Gournay linguistic treatises furnish ample material for satirists by their sheer volume. “Du langage français” (1619) opens with a battle cry:

Une des insolences de la langue humaine, s’acharne contre elle-mesme: insolence plus deprave en nostre Climat, où la presomption est fort affilée, et le jugement fort mousse. Les Docteurs en l’art de parler, dont ce temps est fertile hors tout exemple, nous accablent d’une nuée de considerations et de corrections sur ce subject…L’excellence et la perfection principales
du langage, consistent selon leur opinion, à fuir quelques mots et quelques phrases que les communs parleurs de la Cour ne disent pas…(1: 694)

There are great efforts made here for the world to see the value of maintaining words deemed old school by language reformers. Gournay defends “moult,” “honny,” and the demonstratives “cestuy homme” and “celle femme” in the first and second parts of “Deffence” (1: 1090, 1: 1165). “Jaçoit” is a particular favorite of Gournay’s who employs it at least thirteen times in her work and defends it by arguing that future generations will not take offense with it. “Ce mot “jaçoit” qui vous desplaist…ne desplaira pas à vos successeurs, et peut-estre à vous mesmes la sepmaine qui vient?” (1:1091). “Jaçoit,” along with “ains” are endorsed again in “Deffence” (1: 1107, 1: 1110, 1: 1123). Other lists of words are defended elsewhere, namely in “De la façon d’escrire” (2: 1540-41). These words are criticized by Malherbe’s school of thought and come to take on, in Arnould’s opinion, a “symbolic value” in the linguistic debate between the Ancients and the Moderns (1: 1091 Note B).

Monomachie plays on this symbolic value of words as Gournay’s character praises Ronsard, the “honneur de nostre France” and Du Bellay, “le sçavant.” She denounces Malherbe “l’insolent,” Racan, Mainard “le rusé,” and the poets of the first French Academy for trying to tarnish her fame. Racan, Colletet and L’Etoile were all friends but are portrayed as foes in the play. Although the scene is not without humor, Ilsley points out that “it seems most improbable that Marie de Gournay would have named as her enemies so many of her very good friends of long standing” (238). Gaillard’s and Braquemart’s knowledge of Greek and Latin authors are then tested and
Gournay’s character lauds Gaillard’s metaphors: “Ces carmes sans mentir ont beaucoup de doctrine / Vous allegorisez sur un mot de Marine, / La Metaphore est bonne, & le flus de la mer / Se paragonne bien au flot flottant d’aymer” (48). The use of metaphors is one of Gournay’s own stylistic traits. She believes they are “la principale richesse, la plus fine pierrierie du langage d’un Poëme” (1: 931). But in the play, the judges do not have the same criteria for literary merit and so a winner cannot be determined. To overcome the deadlock, Neufgermain calls in a third judge, a “Docteur Guiono.”

The three judges then listen to two “improvised” poems and Neufgermain asks, “Docteur qu’en dites-vous?” It is not Docteur Guiono who responds, but Gournay who immediately answers: “Je dis en toute sorte / Que sur le Madrigal, le vers saphic l’emporte” (53). There are two implications to this retort. First, there is a possible sexual allusion to Sapho, the poetess from Lesbos. The idea that Gournay, who is unmarried, prefers “le vers saphic,” could be hinting, for the sake of humor, at a sexual preference. Second, and more obvious, Gournay is made to appear self-important to the point of believing she is the “Docteur” of language being questioned. Ironically, it is the docteurs in the art of speaking who are the principal targets of Gournay’s linguistic scourges. In Monomachie, she is made to become what she despises since she uses the term “docteurs,” in her treatises to refer to the Moderns, the young poets of Malherbe’s school.

Gaillard must have been aware of Gournay’s own preponderant and very critical use of “docteur” in her different essays. It is used interchangeably with Censeur (1: 698, 1: 700, 1: 933, 1: 1101), Docteurs en negative (1: 700), Rethoriciens (1: 971), reigleurs d’Ecrits (1: 950), correcteurs (1: 950, 1: 1111, 1: 1019, 1: 1173), Prescheurs de
reputation (1: 1091), Advocats douillets, changeurs et rejeteurs de termes (1: 1092),
perroquet imitateur (1: 1122), Antagonistes (1: 1122), nos celebres Ouvriers (1: 1143),
nouveaux Courtisans barragoins (1: 1148), espece de Polis de Cabinet (1: 1149),
Donzelles et...Fanfarons leurs favoris (1: 1156), Courtisans doucets (1: 1157),
Escrivains nouveaux venus (1: 1166), Douillets (1: 1172), Demoiseaux (1: 1174), Jolis
(1: 1174), Troupe de Grammairiens (1: 1196), la nouvelle Brigade (2: 1539), Ces debiles
esprits (2: 1558), among others. The second treatise of “Deffense” (1: 1144-76) is
noteworthy for its contempt of the ignorance of certain women in linguistic deliberations
and the courtiers, the Polis de cabinet, they manipulate.

It is Gournay’s sledgehammer approach to defending her causes and combating
injustices, then, which elicited mockery. Her contemporaries’ responses to her
demonstrative positions are embodied in her last exchange of words with her fellow
arbiter.

NEUFGERMAIN. Que vostre esprit s’obstine à ses vieilles façons,
Vous auriez bon besoin de prendre mes leçons.
GOURNAY. Ie ne croy pas jamais aller à vostre escolle.
NEUFGERMAIN. Ne contestes pas, taisez-vous vieille folle. (53)

Neufgermain dismisses Gournay as old and crazy. Given his own reputation, this
admonishment is ironic. It can be concluded that she is out of step with her time,
 marginal, even for other recognized marginals. She is labeled “vieille folle” for the

142 Régnier employs similar language when speaking of the “poètes ridicules” in Satire II.
He speaks of the “enfants bâtards” of the muses, “tiercelets de poètes” who have no talent but are
always in search of payment for their work.
purpose of limiting and devaluing her moral and intellectual capacities. She is not taken seriously and her expulsion from literary circles then becomes self-evident.

**Words nursed with mother’s milk: Sorel’s *Rôle des présentions***

In a ten page pamphlet by Charles Sorel, *Role des presentations faites au Grand Jour de l’éloquence française. Premiere assise, le 13 Mars 1634*, Gournay appears on stage with other petitioners to pose language problems to the Academicians. She defends the same words, and in very similar detail, as those her persona defends in *Monomachie*:

S’est presentée la demoiselle de Gournay, requerant qu’on ne retranchast pas du bon François les mots qu’elle a succé avec le laict, qu’elle pourroit soustenir signifier tout ce qu’ils veulent dire, déclarant toutefois la dicte demoiselle que, pour éviter à procez quy finiroit à peine avant sa vie, elle ne demande en ceste premièr assize que le restablissement par provision de *ains, jadis et pieça*, bons et vieux gaulois, comme sçavent tous ceux quy ont leu les livres modernes. – R. Pour *jadis* et *pieça*, fins de non-recevoir; pour *ains*, soit communiqué au sieur abbé de Croisilles. (Fournier 134-5)

The pamphlet was republished in 1650 with notable changes, including the title which becomes *Roole des présentations, faites aux grands jours de l’Académie Françoise, sur la Reformation de nostre langue. Premièr Assise du lundi 13. mars 1646*. For the passage concerning Gournay, the benefactors of *ains* are no longer limited to the abbot Jean Baptiste Croisilles (d. 1651) but now include the “rhabilleurs de vieux livres, qui, en ayant ôté les mots qui leur semblent trop moisis de vieillesse, y en mettent quelques nouveaux, afin de faire passer cela pour une nouvelle traduction.”

143 The 1650 edition can be found in Pellison (455).
langue française, a source of many of Gournay’s ideas on poetry, namely, that French needed to be enriched by the imitation of ancient authors. In both Du Bellay and Gournay there is “une urgence à enrayer l’assaut en même temps qu’un effort éclairé pour étayer l’édifice culturel de la Renaissance” (Noiset, Marie de Gournay 129). This sense of urgency is undoubtedly what prompted Gournay to adapt Du Bellay’s title for her own “Deffence de la Poësie et du langage de Poëtes” (1626).

*Rôle des présentations* parodies a society in flux. Real and imaginary figures, both men and women, present a variety of linguistic problems to the Academy: Charlotte des Ursins, vicomtesse d’Auchy requests that the Scriptures be translated “en termes . . . doux;” “un capitaine licencié” wants his letter of dismissal explained; several women ask “qu’elles peussent s’approprier le mot de ravissant et l’appliquer à tout;” a poetry novice wants to know the gender of *navire* and *affaire*, “de peur de se mesprendre en chose d’importance” (128-33). Gournay, as an emblematic defender of a cause, was an obvious choice for *Rôle*, especially since she had been previously targeted by pamphleteers. Her character functions above all as a foil to make fun of the idea of petitioners submitting words and expressions to a tribunal whose members debate their relative merit.

*“Allez-vous-en ailleurs”: Saint Évremont’s Comédie des Académistes*

*La Comédie des Académistes* (1638) was originally the work of several authors and published anonymously. It was at first attributed to Saint Amant, causing him great concern as there was talk of throwing the author in the Bastille for the portrayal of Séguier, a powerful chancellor whose protection Saint Amant sought (Lagny XIII). Saint-
Évremont, though, will modify the short play considerably and become recognized as the principal author. It puts on scene the French Academy at work, satirizing its preoccupation with language change and its tendency to suppress different words and expressions. Gournay herself is not the principal target. It is the institution of the Academy that Saint-Évremont is attacking and as such the Academicians who occupy center stage are derided as drunkards, sophists and sycophants.

For many readers, this comedy was good-hearted humor among friends. Robert de Bonnières explains that Saint-Évremont would not have held drinking against Saint Amant, whom he liked, or Faret, whose name rhymed too well with “cabaret” not to use it.\textsuperscript{144} Magne (3-4) makes a similar comment when relating Faret’s excessive drinking, saying that “M. de Saint Amant avait raison de l’en punir en donnant, uniformément, dans ses poèmes, son nom comme rime à ‘cabaret.’” This comment serves to illustrate the importance of respecting social codes. Magne condones Saint Amant’s punishment of Faret. The underlying concept is that excess, of any sort, even amongst friends, is subject to reprimand. Gournay’s character, as in the other satires, has a double purpose. It is used to further make sport of the Academicians; in the process though, it also serves as a mechanism of constraint and reprimand for her entering what Pierre Bourdieu has called the “literary field,”\textsuperscript{145} a social space inhabited by writers who struggle over “the question


\textsuperscript{145} Very briefly, this notion refers to the institutions, practices, and principles of evaluation occupied by writers. One’s position on the terrain is not a fixed, but determined by the relative space occupied by others.
of knowing who is part of the universe, who is a real writer and who is not.” With Gournay’s persona made to appear time and again in a very unflattering light, we understand that her contemporaries did not view her as a “real writer” on the playing field of literature.

Her character, “la sibylle, Gournay,” “la veille biche” appears in Act III scene 2, and as she begins to speak, a tooth falls out. “Baissez-vous, Boisrobert, et ramassez sa dent,” says Sérizay. Again, the lofty, arduous battle Gournay won to become learned is brushed aside and replaced with something lowly for the purpose of laughter. While it is conceivable that the slapstick techniques used to interpret Gournay’s character did evoke chuckles or snickers, the repercussions in her case, as opposed to the other people on stage, were to perpetuate an extremely restricted portrait. Gournay’s response to comments on her age in Comédie is witty enough.

BOISROBERT. Nymphe des premiers ans, sommes-nous pas bien sots?
GOURNAY. Vous le dites; c’est vous qui faites l’injure.
SILHON. Vous avez le parler de la Sainte Escriture.
SÉRIZAY. Elle est de l’an de grace.
GOURNAY. Et plus vieille, dit-on.

Gournay’s retort in this scene is nothing she would not say herself, but perhaps a tad pithier. In 1619 she jokes about her age in her foreword to Traicté sur la Poësie. “Suis-je pas fine, Lecteur, si je te puis induire d’aymer l’antiquité? Puis qu’estant moy-mesme de cette date, j’espereray de grapiller parmy le marché quelque parcelle en ta bonne grace” (251).

Her age is played on as well as her contempt for Malherbe, whom her character would like to see hanged, like “le bon larron”:

SÉRIZAY. Du moins vous avez vu mourir le bon larron.
GOURNAY. Ouy, je l’ay vu mourir, et je ne fais qu’attendre
       Le trespass d’un mauvais qu’on doit bientost prendre;
       Je serois satisfait en le voyant pendu.
SÉRIZAY. Pendre ainsy les larrons, c’est un fait trop ardu.
GOURNAY. Quand on disoit ardu on rendoit justice.
       (Saint Évremond’s emphasis)

Gournay’s unfavorable evaluation of Malherbe, here in *Comédie*, could not be more clear. She was not one to mask her opinions in her own writings. In *Advis* she manages to plainly indicate Malherbe without giving his name. In the acerbic “Sur la Version des Poëtes antiques, ou des Metaphors,” she disdains Malherbe’s style of language and his desire to establish usage rules:

Pour nos premiers Poëtes, Ronsard, Du-Bellay, Desportes, quiconque ne congnoist l’éloquence du Port au foin ne peut exprimer de quelles pouilles il les ait saluez tout le long de leurs marges, en quelques Exemplaires qu’il gardoit exprès pour les montrer enrichis de cette broderie…qu’en nos jours le jugement de la Cour se soit trouvé si detraqué, si loin de ses allignemens, que non seulement il ait peu supporter sans aversion celuy qui parloit de ceste sorte: mais de plus, que cette sorte de langage luy ait servy de planche à passer en l’estime . . . lequel pourtant je ne nommeray point. (1: 960-61)

Gournay’s indications are hardly subtle. One well known anecdote about Malherbe was that when questioned about French vocabulary, he would defer to his own masters in language matters, the longshoremen, “les crocheteurs” at Port au Foin. Racan tells the story, saying “Quand on lui demandoit son avis de quelque mot françois, il envoiyoit
ordinairement aux crocheteurs du Port-au-Foin, et disoit que c’estoient ses maîtres pour le langage.”

Malherbe’s choice of language models could not have been more offensive for Gournay. Longshoremen were known for their abusive insults and by extension, a “crocheteur” belonged to the lowlife who, as Furetière explains in his dictionary, beat their wives and drank bad wine: “. . . des gens de basse condition qui font des choses indignes des honnestes gens. ‘Il n’appartient qu’aux Crocheteurs de battre leurs femmes. On nous a donné à ce repas du vin de Crocheteur. Ces gens-là se sont dit des injures de Crocheteur.’” Gournay draws a connection between levels of language and levels of morals in different essays, such as in “De la neantise, des communes vaillances de ce temps: et du peu de prix de la qualité de Noblesse” (1626). This text bemoans the brutish social practices of the nobility, drunk with the power of their swords and sick with a “contagious whim” that has them putting on airs. The “cavaliers de bouteille et de cabaret” (1: 902) are further plagued by the vice of insolence which is not only offensive in and of itself, but because it is inseparable from other vices. Gournay questions the transformations taking place amongst the nobility who are leaving their dignified pastimes for “le bordel, le berlan, la gourmandise, et parfois l’yvrongnerie” (1: 902). Language and morality are reflections of each other and so it follows that “le nouvel usage de parler de quelques-uns a grand tort, de qualifier une simple et crue vaillance, générosité” (1: 903).

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Implicit in Gournay’s discussion here of the different notions behind the words “valiance” and “generosity” is the plea against any restriction of language which could hinder its ability to effectively describe one’s behavior and its underlying moral essence. In *Comédie*, Gournay’s theories on the inherent connection between good language and morality is portrayed: “Le vice en ce temps-là fut *du tout* abbatu; / L’on mettoit en crédit les hommes de vertu”. She longs for a past epoch when virtue was rewarded over vice. The response Gournay receives from Sérizay, however, implies that her allegiance with past traditions has blinded her judgment. “Ce que vous allégez me paroist une fable. / Allez-vous-en ailleurs faire vostre harangue.” It ensues that Malherbe’s attempt at provocation with his references of dock workers for proper language usage was obviously quite successful at eliciting incomprehension.

Malherbe was also notorious for scratching out texts he did not like and then annotating the reason in the margins, possibly one of the reasons Gournay referred to Malherbe’s writing and “chicken scrawl” in *Grief des dames*:

A propos dequoy, je tomabay l’autre jour sur une Epistre liminaire de certain personage, du nombre de ceux-là qui font piaffe de ne s’amuser jamais à lire un Escrit de femme: mon Dieu que de diadesmes, que de gloire, que d’Orient, que de splendeur, que de Palestine, recherchez cent lieues par delà le mon Liban! Mon Dieu que de pieds de mouche, passans pour autant de Phenix en l’opinion de leur maistre” (1: 1078).

In 1634 Gournay changed “Jourdain” to “Liban,” leading Venesoen to infer that she was taking a dig at Malherbe (*Égalité* 67, N. 4). In the case of a book of Ronsard’s poetry,

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Racan tells of how Malherbe scratched out more than he left, before finally scratching out everything. Gournay’s sharp commentaries carry with them her deepest concern for the posterity of the authors she revered the most. For Saint-Évremont, on the other hand, the stakes are not the same. At the end of Gournay’s appearance, she begs that the Academicians allow to remain in usage, at the very least, the words *blandice, angoisse* and *los*. The request is countered by Boisrobert with yet another comment on Gournay’s age and soundness of mind. “Ecoutez les discours de cette vieille folle”.

In his 1879 forward of *Les Académiciens*, a later version of *Comédie*, Bonnières presents the “conversational satire,” not as a work of art but as a “curious monument to the history of French letters” (I). Saint Évremont, too, was concerned with the evolution of French which he saw passing under state control. The aim of his mockery was not so much the contests of vanity of the Academicians, but the pointlessness of their undertaking. “Comment Saint Amant et Chapelain eussent-ils pu s’entendre pour édicter les mêmes lois de goût et de langage!” Bonnière exclaims (XXXIX). For Gournay, though, any attempt at legislating language was interpreted as a personal affront which struck her to her very core of her being, so strong was her adherence to humanist traditions and values. Her adversaries would hold her convictions in contempt, qualifying her as a

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149 Racan writes that “Malherbe avoit effacé plus de la moitié de son Ronsard, et en cottoit les raisons à la marge. Un jour, Racan, Colomy, Yvrande et autres de ses amys, le feuilletteoient sur sa table, et Racan luy demanda s’il approuvoit ce qu’il n’avoit point effacé. ‘Pas plus que le reste’, dit-il...Et sur l’heure il acheva d’effacer le reste (272-73). Arnould tells this anecdote (1:960-61 Note D). Tallemant recounts this story, word for word (119) to which Adam adds that a copy of Ronsard’s *Parnasse* (1607) which belonged to Malherbe, does indeed have poems scratched out (805, Note 3).
“pucelle de mille ans,” or a “vieille folle.” As trivial as her appearances in these satires may seem on the surface, they are noteworthy, as Giovanna Devincenzo argues: “Les apostrophes qu’on lui adresse . . . sont d’ailleurs significatives et cachent une grande animosité. On lui reproche de ne pas être à la page et on attaque durement son obstination à porter le drapeau délaissé de la Pléiade. . . .”\(^{150}\) A different perspective, though, is found in Sainte-Beuve’s *Tableau historique* (1828). It is tied to romanticism, and thus more favorable to Gournay than eighteenth-century critics, such as Jean-Pierre Nicéron. Of significance in Sainte-Beuve’s exposé on Gournay is how he captures the essence of her part in the *querelle*. Her texts, he says, were “non moins remarquables par l’audace des doctrines que par la virilité de l’expression” (160). Regrettably for Gournay, “audacity” and “virility” were not prized in women, thus setting her up as the perfect candidate for mystification for having “usurped a reputation through oddity or trickery” (McGinnis 132). Her mystification is a form of a vengeance for having adopted the traditionally male qualities; she usurps characteristics not appropriate for her sex.

When writing the last variation of the introductory letter for *Advis* in 1641, Gournay revises the expectations for her compilation, giving the ironic impression of having abandoned the notion, but perhaps not the desire, of pleasing her current and future readers. This chapter examines the extent to which Gournay was indeed successful in her prospects of finding favor in the Republic of Letters at large during the seventeenth century, or perhaps more accurately, why she was unsuccessful. Specifically, though, it investigates how consciously and unconsciously, correspondance, mémoires and epitaphs written during the seventeenth century, subvert Gournay’s own self-fashioned myth. The myths she erected for herself become *re-mythified*, distorted versions of the originals. The argument put forth here is that the different pieces written on, or about her, contribute to a remythification process by both her detractors and unsuspecting defenders alike. She, as a person, and her different works, are inadequately or inaccurately portrayed in a practice that uses literary power to enforce cultural boundaries.

Gournay’s self-fashioning will be *refashioned* into a mythic construct, void of any inherent literary value, that can then be summarily dismissed by future critics or biographers. This process is a parallel to what Mary Daly (43) terms a “deadly deception:
mystification through myth.” Patriarchy, for Daly, perpetuates itself through myths, deceiving women into believing that male myths are the only path to self-discovery. Instead of achieving a deeper knowledge of themselves, women become “holographs . . . the absence of Self. This is flat, surface existence, deceptively giving the impression of depth . . . (50)”. This is precisely the image that will be made of Gournay’s persona but in a process that it better termed for my purpose as “mystification through remythification.”

In *Advis*, the bold claims for posterity that are present in the 1626 and 1634 rewrites of the original 1608 text have calmed to some degree. That is to say, the tone is more guarded and composed and the drawing of a young pine tree casting its shadow out to future generations has disappeared. Her assessment of her work and her era, nonetheless, remain unmistakable. Among the many changes made, the verbe *to please* is replaced with *to find favor, goodwill*. In the previous editions, she describes herself “audacious enough” to want to “plaire à tous les sages et desplaire à tous les fols” (569 Note 9). She now attempts to downplay this audacity, when her intentions become “d’avoir la faveur de tous les sages, soit par droit ou par hasard, et la deffaveur de tous ceux qui ne sont pas marquez à ce coin” (569).

The cruelty of some of the qualifications and depictions of Gournay, accompanied by her own disillusionment of her times, leave one to wonder whether she found any audience at all among her contemporaries. In every version of the liminary letter of *Advis*, from 1608, when it appeared in *Bienvenue*, to the third and final edition in 1641, Gournay

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151 Sankovitch (5) cites Daly when speaking of the “mock presence” of women in male myths.
questions the reader about her work, asking “par où te pourroit-il plaire?” (568). She concludes dishearteningly that her the body of her work “n’espere pas de rencontrer souvent une oreille favorable” (570). She professes little faith in her contemporaries who, for the most part are plagued with either “impertinence” or “ignorance” (569).

As seen above however, Gournay’s bibliography displays some undeniable successes. Noiset fittingly states that Gournay’s perception of reality should not mislead one into condemning all of her contemporaries for their lack of understanding. “…Il faut se rappeler que ses écrits ont eu deux niveaux de réception. La majorité des textes réunis dans l’Ombre et les Advis avaient eu un public antérieur. Souvent adressés à des personnages en vue des deux sexes, ils avaient d’abord, pour la plupart, été bien reçus” (“Marie de Gournay” 195). Gournay carefully selected individuals to whom she addressed her treatises and was in turn granted pensions, albeit meager, and was honored with an invitation from Henri IV to attend court. These transactions functioned on a private level between Gournay and different benefactors. Her rewards were not the product of a widespread, public recognition of her talents based on her publications. Satirical pieces, in their militant role of admonishing what is considered ridiculous or dogmatic, clearly pinpointed Gournay as a target. But they were not the only forces at work shaping and reshaping her persona. There would be other “literary consequences” as the following sections will show.152

152 Greenblatt (9) develops the concept of “literary consequences” as an inherent component of any act of self-fashioning.
CORRESPONDENCE

A range of letters, mémoires, anecdotes, biographies and critical accounts of Gournay’s writings all contribute to the construction of her persona and to her different receptions over generations. They contribute perhaps to a greater degree than her mise en scène, as they are viewed as more serious, than “Le poét crotté,” or Comédie des Académistes, for example. Still today, many of these texts are accepted as proof of her positive reception during the seventeenth century. The objective of this section is to uncover what constructions of power, prestige and femininity were conveyed in the letters to, or about Gournay, and the strategies used to unconsciously impose inequalities based on social status and gender. She is a prime example of how literary consequences, beyond one’s control, can cause the boundaries between different identities to merge. In Gournay’s case, her “dramatic sense of life” was so pervasive in her own writing that it would promote the production of the texts below.

Pasquier’s “belle catastrophe”

Étienne Pasquier (1529-1615) did much to fashion Gournay as an epic heroine who braved civil war to mourn Montaigne’s death in the company of his wife and daughter. This notable historiographer and lawyer chronicled his times in Recherches de

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la France\textsuperscript{154} in what George Huppert called a “new history,” one that gathered and quoted sources to present a “reconstruction of the past for the needs of the present” (34).\textsuperscript{155} As such, he relied on official records rather than more dramatically embellished chroniclers or hearsay. In his Lettres\textsuperscript{156} (1619) it is therefore not surprising to find a more straightforward approach to his description of Gournay than other accounts which rely on caricature or grandiose metaphors. Pasquier’s letter is particularly relevant because, as he tells his correspondent, M. de Pelgé, he had spent time with Montaigne.\textsuperscript{157} “Nous estions luy et moy familiers et amis, par une mutuelle rencontre des letters, fusmes ensemble en la ville de Blois, lors de cest fameuse assemblée des Trois Estats…” (145). Around 1605 he wrote to M. de Pelgé, a fellow lawyer, on the subject of Montaigne and the reception of the Essais, a subject on which Pelgé had expressed interest. He gives details of Montaigne’s last hours then says that, in dying, he left two virtuous daughters, one heiress of his belongings and the other heiress of his studies, “sa fille d’alliance” (148).

Pasquier obviously felt compelled by Gournay’s strength of character, for he tells Pelgé that he cannot conclude his letter without speaking more of her. He begins his final paragraph by situating Gournay socially, saying that she came from good Parisian families and that she “ne s’est proposée d’avoir jamais autre mary que son honneur,” enriched by good books, especially the Essais (148). He confirms both Montaigne’s


\textsuperscript{157} Citations of this letter are from Millet (143-49).
respect for Gournay and Gournay’s account of their contacts, by speaking of Montaigne’s extended stays at her home in Gournay-sur-Aronde. His final statements about Gournay are the most colorful.

Enfin, ceste vertueuse Damoiselle advertie de sa mort, traversa presques tout la France, souz la faveur des passeports, tant par son propre dessein, que par celuy de la veuve et de la fille qui la convierent d’aller mesler ses pleurs et regrets, qui furent in finis, avec les leurs. L’histoire en est vrayment memorabe. La vie de ce Gentilhomme ne pouvoit estre clause d’une plus belle catastrophe que celle-cy. A Dieu. (148-49)

Originally from Latin *virtus*, meaning “quality of man,” *vir*, virtue was a moral value:

“Qui a de la force et de la vigueur . . . vertueux, se dit aussi parmi les curieux, de ceux qui s'adonnent à la recherche des belles choses, qui ont du goust pour les arts, les sciences, et les curiositez naturelles” (Furetière). Gournay displayed these “qualities of man,” strength, courage and a passion for the arts embodied in the concept of *vertu*. It is what moved her to do what she believed was right following Montaigne’s death, that is to say, to pay him respect in the presence of her adopted family. However, Pasquier’s use of “vertueuse” and his juxtaposition “mari” and honneur” also function as references to chastity, her image of the noble virgin so often put forward by other biographers and critics. To join her “infinite” tears and regrets with theirs, Gournay had to cross “almost all” of France.

The qualifications of Gournay’s feelings and her journey express what a dramatic feat her trip actually was, especially for a young woman whose passeport, her right of passage, could not fully guarantee her safety and well-being. Pasquier was suitably impressed. He brings finishes his letter by reckoning that the life of this “Sénèque” and
the tragedy of his death could not have closed on a more beautiful note. Yet, there is a question as to the referent of the paradoxical phrase “belle catastrophe”. Logically it is Gournay’s courage to undertake such a remarkable voyage to Montaigne. She safely completed a precarious expedition to honor her covenant father. The literal meaning of catastrophe is the conclusion of a tragedy. “C'est le changement et la revolution qui se fait dans un Poème dramatique, et qui le termine ordinairement” (Furetière). Figuratively, the word is understood as an unhappy, deadly ending: “La vie de ce grand homme se termina par une estrange catastrophe.” It is then curious to find the qualification of beautiful linked to Montaigne’s death. Pasquier’s letter, however, is most striking for what it does not say.

There is no reproachful tone in his comments about Gournay’s marital status or her choice of professions. One could reason that Pasquier was respectful either of Gournay herself and her decisions, or of Montaigne’s faith in her abilities. Sankovitch asserts the position that Pasquier held more conformist views about women. “Since Marie, being not well-off and not a desirable heiress like Catherine des Roches, Pasquier does not bother to voice social disapproval” (75). Following this reasoning, it was not worth Pasquier’s time to even comment on these facts. Additionally, Gournay may be Montaigne’s héritière de ses études, but this term remains isolated, unsupported by Pasquier’s usual quotations from witnesses and texts. There is no mention of her editorial work on the Essais. Nor does he speak of Le Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne, par sa fille d’alliance which appeared in 1594 and 1599. Fogel (13) comments that the title
alone should have gotten Pasquier’s attention. It is impossible to evaluate Gournay’s position as Montaigne’s literary heiress from his letter.

Yet Pasquier felt obliged to include her. However, this obligation was limited to an acknowledgment of her physical presence with Montaigne’s family where she shared in their tears. The omission of her literary activities seems odd for a man reputed for his relations with scholars, poets, historians, artists, scientists and other men of culture. Possibly Pasquier assumed Pelgé knew of Gournay’s work. Or, more likely, it was not important. Yet, as Huppert explains (58), Pasquier had a point of view on everything, with a philosophy “entirely within the bounds of classical and Christian convention.” A man of traditional convention would not look favorably on a woman taking editorial control of the *Essais*. As a great admirer of Montaigne, though, Pasquier respected his choice of Gournay as his adopted daughter but preferred, nevertheless, not to comment on her contribution to his legacy and certainly not the use of his name for her own literary designs.

**Balzac and the art of eloquent degradation**

An abrupt rupture occurs in the more favorable receptions of Gournay’s writings, such as *Promenoir* and her treatises on education, and those when she “goes public” with her controversial opinions, as evidenced with such texts as *Defence des Peres Jesuites*, the 1595 preface to the *Essais* and her corpus of linguistic treatises. One such instance of negative reception occurs when Gournay enters into correspondence with Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac. Balzac published his *Lettres* (1626) to an immediate success and they
won him the reputation of “Empereur des Esprits” for their eloquence and manifestation of the modernist trend. They came to be considered the “modèles absolus de la langue épurée et de sa mise en forme, l’éloquence’ [elles] deviennent un objet de référence” (Fogel 239). *Lettres* provided a forum for political debates and for opinions on everyday affairs. Balzac would be elected into the Academy in 1634, against his will, and visited it only once, on his last trip to Paris in 1636.

Adam’s (242-43) description of the aura surrounding Balzac provides an indication as to why Gournay might have actively sought to correspond with the young writer. “Désormais, une lettre de Balzac sera reçue dans les cercles de Paris avec la révérence qu’on accorde aux encycliques des souverains pontifes: ‘La canonization estoit trop peu de fait, il falloit une apothéose.’”

Balzac played an active role in the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, taking on humanists and venerated authors such as Desportes, Du Perron and Coeffeteau in favor of a “humanisme rajeuni et conquérant, qui trouve dans les modèles du passé, non des formules, mais de vivantes leçons” (Adam 255). For Gournay, the stakes involved in corresponding with Balzac were enticing. She strove to position herself in the same circles as the highly acclaimed writer to gain his ear in current debates. Gournay sensed the changes in linguistic politics and wanted to obtain greater access to the decision making process.

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158 Adam (243) cites Jean-Pierre Camus’s *Conférence académique sur le différend des belles-lettres de Narcisse et de Phyllarque, par le sieur de Musac* (Paris, J. Cottereau, 1630) 94-95.
To create the opportunity for greater access, she needed to control others’ perception of her writing and of herself. This positioning is reflected in a response from Balzac to a letter Gournay had addressed to him in 1624. Not only could she hope to have her letter published in a future collection, thus bestowing upon her some vicarious recognition and honor through her association with the new literary master, but Gournay was also earnestly searching to dialogue on the evolution of language with an authority on the French literary scene. In writing a letter to Balzac, Gournay was doing much more than making a personal declaration of her opinions within the confines of the enclosed space of a letter. Quite to the contrary, her correspondent was one of the foremost epistolarians of the time and taking up the pen with him became a social act, part of the complex process of self-fashioning through which Gournay hoped to form and reform her social identity. To this end, and based on Balzac’s response, it can be inferred that Gournay included a copy of her Apologie in her letter. Unfortunately, Balzac did not include her letter to him in his publications and the letter was lost. His response, however, appeared in the 1626 edition of Les Premières Lettres de Guez de Balzac and undoubtedly did little to advance Gournay’s reputation.

Several passages of this letter, dated August 30, 1624, are of interest for the development of the Gournay persona. Balzac crafts his letter, moving from subtle hints of disapproval to obvious caricatural digs on Gournay’s virtue, appearance, and age. The title, “Reponse à une lettre de M. D. G.,” opens the letter with the false decorum of one

looking to preserve the integrity of a lady by keeping her name a secret. Balzac’s decorum, though, is feigned and does nothing to veil the identity of Gournay, as many details of her life and writings are revealed during the course of the letter. Fogel (238-45) provides an analysis of this letter. She states (239) that Gournay finds it impossible to remain on the sidelines of the quarrel of the “Lettres.” Gournay felt that it was her responsibility as editor of the *Essais* to take a stance to uphold the notion of a necessary link between extraordinary concepts and uncommon vocabulary, deemed outdated by her contemporaries. She was perhaps hoping that Balzac would render the content of their discussion public. In looking at Balzac’s response he cursorily addresses questions of language usage and the meaning of “parler bien nostre langue” (251). Of relevance for the Gournay persona is the outcome of her attempt at networking with this notable individual.

Balzac establishes the parameters of their relationship in the first sentence by grounding them in the unfavorable images previously circulated about Gournay. “Je vous déclare d’abord que je n’ai point d’autre opinion de vous que celle que vous me donnez vous-même, et j’ai toujours jugé plus hardiment des qualités de l’âme par la parole, que par la physionomie” (249).\(^{160}\)

Balzac introduces Gournay’s supposedly unflattering physical appearance, her “physionomie” from the outset, one of the most often used tools of denigration in the anti-Gournay catalog. Its reference alone is enough to conjure up

\(^{160}\) Citations of this letter are from *Les Premières Lettres* (249-252).
other images used to downgrade her. The same is true of Balzac’s use of terms reminiscent of those found in *l’Anti-Coton*, where Gournay “served the public well.”

> C’est un effet de cette erreur qui a vieilly dans l’esprit du peuple, qu’il est besoin qu’une honneste femme ignore beaucoup de choses, & que pour porter ce nom-là il n’est pas necessaire qu’elle soit louée de tout le monde, mais il faut qu’elle ne soit connuë de personne. (249)

Although Balzac states that he generally agrees with this “error” about women remaining ignorant, for the purpose of “order,” he can in fact conceive of the idea that some women can maintain the virtues of their sex all the while exhibiting male virtues, that is to say, being “known,” or in biblical terms, having carnal knowledge. The dig had been made. Women should not seek out praise or recognition and this for the sake of public order.

Writing and virtue are intimately, yet ambiguously, linked for women in this passage from Balzac which reflects the broader, European and Catholic mindset of what women’s occupations should be. Jesuit priest Alonso de Andrade would clarify this link in his *Tratado de la Virgen* (1642) with a play on words between *romera*, “pilgrim” and *ramera*, “prostitute”: “porque de romera a ramera hay poquissima distancia.”\(^{161}\) Olwen Hufton (430) gives the translation “From pilgrim to prostitute there is but little distance.”\(^{162}\) Gournay’s letter was not a private, spiritual avowal nor was it the account of the life of a saint which could have been considered mental *pilgrimages* and as such, acceptable practices for women. Gournay did more than “slip” into the male arena of

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writing on language and politics, she stomped, and for this she paid the high price of her reputation.

Later in the text Balzac plays on common digs of Gournay’s looks more openly: “…vostre beauté, je parle de celle qui…ne s’en est point allée avecque vostre jeunesse” (250). Even though Balzac insists that he judges one’s qualities based on words, not on looks, he does not refrain from bringing up her looks. When speaking of her relative beauty, Balzac is reinforcing the symbolic, symmetrical vision of women as good or evil. Matthews-Grieco, in her chapter on “La Polarisation asymétrique de l’identité féminine,” explains how the diffusion of neo-platonism in the sixteenth century contributed to the reinforcement of the dualist portrait of women, which attributes all virtues to beauty and all vices to ugliness (71-2). According to this logic, in which feminine logic is self-evident, Balzac is questioning Gournay’s inherent morality, for “les belles seraient vertueuses et les laides vicieuses” (77). The invocation of her appearance leads also to a reflection of her age. Balzac thereby provides himself with another subject for an adroit sting. He purposely creates the illusion that he has no other basis on which to form an opinion of her than her letter, even though they evolved in the same circles, notably during the Regency.

Balzac’s ingenuity is to use Gournay’s own letter against her and, as Fogel (240) also explains, it is a prohibitive tactic “pour l’exclure du réseau actuel de ses relations”. Instead of mentioning common friends such as François Ogier,\textsuperscript{163} he seems to imply that

\textsuperscript{163} It was he who wrote the inscription for her tombstone discussed below.
she can only count Lipsius and Montaigne among her admirers. “…ces deux grands personnages, qui ont admiré vostre vertu naissante, & laissé vostre portrait de leur main, me doivent servir de contrepoison pour me guarentir des impressions & de la vraiy-semblance mesme de la calomnie” (249). Again, he later comments, “Mademoiselle, si mon approbation est de quelque poix, vous la pouvez adjouster en vostre faveur à celle de Lipse & de Montaigne” (250). Lipsius had died in 1606 and Montaigne in 1592. By naming just these two partisans of Gournay, Balzac accomplishes two aims. Firstly, he excludes her from current circles of writers. He implies she is an outsider to the debates at hand and thus inconsequential. He refrains from more than perfunctory comments on her interrogations, offering to bring her a copy of a book he is writing. Of this book or visit there is no further record.\(^\text{164}\)

Secondly, in this passage Balzac manages to cleverly introduce a subject of caricature, Gournay’s age. She is made to appear a generation removed from the present. This second point loses all subtlety in another double-edged remark. “Depuis le temps qu’on vous loüe, la Chrestienté a changé dix fois de face. Ny nos moeurs, ny nos habillemens, ny nostre Cour ne seroient pas reconnoissables à celle que vous avez veuë” (250). In 1624, when Balzac wrote this letter, Gournay was fifty-eight years old and had without a doubt witnessed many upheavals in the social, economic and political fabric of France. Balzac’s hyperbolic formulation, though, undercuts any accolade and strips his comment of all praise leaving Gournay with the thinly masked common appellation of

\(^{164}\) Philippe Tamizey de Larroque who edited Balzac’s *Lettres* (1873) would comment that this letter was “aimable,” unlike Balzac’s later letters which he deemed much harsher.
“vieille fille,” found in all parodies of her. A future literary historian would justify this last expression from Balzac. In 1892, Adrien Dupuy claims that Gournay was “si peu femme,” that she could not have been hurt by the comment, and so Balzac was not ridiculous in writing it. A similar remark was made by Bonnières (XXXVII) in his introduction to a later edition of Saint Évremont’s Comédie, in 1879, under the name of Les Académiciens. In his description of the literary debates of the early seventeenth century he feigns almost forgetting “la moins féminine” of women authors, thereby making two cuts in one comment.

The question of Gournay’s sex also found its way into a debate on grammar reform. One difficulty Modernists came up against when delatinizing the language was to determine whether an activity or profession should be declined as feminine or masculine, the only possibilities in French. Balzac was probed on the matter by scholars from Guyenne and responded in May 1634 in a letter to Guillaume Girard secretary to the governor of Guyenne, the Duke of Épernon:

Pour celui qui donne rang à mademoiselle de Gournay entre les Auteurs modernes, et l’appelle Poète et Philosophe, il me semble qu’il n’a pas commis une telle incongruité qui l’on se l’imagine: ni celui qui lui a demandé depuis quand elle avait changé de sexe…les noms qui signifient quelque dignité ou quelque profession, ne sont pas moins féminins que masculins, comme dux, tyrannus, philosophus…Vous me demanderez peut-être si le Latin & et Grec doivent donner loy aux autres langues, & que s’il faut suivre en cecy l’analogie; A quoy MONSIEUR, je vous répondray, qu’en mon particulier j’ay jusques icy suivi l’usage, & que je dis bien qu’une femme a esté conseillere d’une telle action, mais non pas jugesse d’un tel proces…Que si l’usage d’une langue naissante, ou tout le

Gournay, as practitioner of different literary occupations, provided a fruitful case study in the stabilization of French. In Guyenne, home to Montaigne, she was perhaps an obvious choice for debate since she had maintained the friendship of his family and respect for her editorial work on the *Essais*. Balzac’s discussion of Gournay possibly discloses tactical maneuvering on his part to find favor within the Duke of Épernon’s circle, for no other document of his accords her such highly coveted denominations as poet and philosopher, where he seemingly accepts the reality of her works. Given Balzac’s other descriptions of her, however, his lack of scornful invectives should be viewed as guarded irony. Indeed, the humor in the word *philosophesse*, while far more sophisticated than the buttocks of “La Dame Marguerite Bas des fesses” of *Remerciment* is nevertheless based on the same part of anatomy.

Gournay herself played on imagery of gender when she published her translation of the poem “Hermaphroditus.” Balzac may have read her “Masle, femelle, neutre, ayant roulé mes jours: / Dagué, pendu, noyé, je terminay leur cours” (2: 1816). Her non-essentialist philosophy is based on the unity of the sexes. Nowhere does Gournay insist more clearly on this notion than in *Égalité*, where the iconographic figure of the

166 Balzac’s *Lettres* contain many letters written to Girard with whom he displayed a very cordial relationship. He also corresponded with the Duke of Épernon directly.
hermaphrodite, the perfect union of opposites into a harmonious resolution, found in the iconography of alchemy, is formulated in biblical terms.\textsuperscript{167}

l’Animal-humain n’est homme ny fe mme, à le bien prendre...il n’est rien plus semblable au chat sur une fenêtre, que la chatte. L’homme et la femme sont tellement uns, que si l’homme est plus que la femme, la femme est plus que l’homme. L’homme fut créé masle et femele, ce dit l’Escriture: ne comtant ces deux pour un et Jesus-Christ est appelé Fils de l’homme, bien qu’il ne soit que de la femme: perfection entière et consumée de la preuve de cette unité des deux sexes. (978-79)

Gournay’s thesis that man and woman are a unified being is symbolically reflected in Balzac’s use of both genders when he speaks about her occupations. Attuned as Gournay was to questions of equality and to the hermetic imagery of alchemy, Balzac’s emblematic juxtapositions of gender in her recognition as poète and rhétoricienne, philosophe and traductrice could have been flattering. The interpretation of the nature of the linguistic confusion, however, remains problematic.

Whereas Balzac could not have overlooked the collective mental images of a woman as both angelic and demonic, for Gournay there is the positive interpretation of unity, the hermaphrodite. Her persona is malleable for those who write on her, depending on whether she is to be praised or criticized. She can be androgynous when her qualities as a writer or the strength and accuracy of her texts are highlighted. On the other hand, when her work is criticized, for any reason, one can always point out that the weakness of her sex is the cause. Adrien Ballet uses this dismissive tactic in Jugemens des sçavans

\textsuperscript{167} Different representations of androgyny that Gournay may have seen are in manuscripts such as Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit (fifteenth century), Rosarium philosophorum (sixteenth century), Maier’s Atalanta fugiens (1618), a lengthy picture series from the Philosophia reformata by Mylius (1622). These and others are compiled by Alexander Roob, The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy & Mysticism, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Taschen, 1997) 456-64.
(1685). “Cette bonne Damoiselle a fait des observations sur le *Langage François, sur la Poësie & sur les diminutifs*. Ce n’est pas ce qu’il y a de meilleur dans ses ouvrages, il y a un peu trop du foible de son sexe . . . (247). Baillet does not have doubts about Gournay’s virtue. She is this “bonne Damoiselle,” a member of the socially inferior class of women. As an honest woman, she is weak in intellect and her treatises on the French language are held up as proof. Although Baillet is careful to point out, by name, the treatises that he considers are not the “best” part of Gournay’s work, he avoids the obvious question that then arises as to what does in fact constitute the best part of her writings.

**Conspiratorial overtones**

No other letters remain between Balzac and Gournay but he did speak of her in several letters to friend and fellow Academician, Jean Chapelain. In these letters, he makes mention of her in hostile terms.\(^{168}\) In August 1639 Chapelain complains (474) to Balzac that he is being harrassed by Gournay’s demands for correspondence. Balzac responds in December 1639 with a scathing condemnation of Gournay’s attempts at dialogue. After mentioning a “Marquise”\(^{169}\) whose letters he willingly endures, he explains how he managed to rid himself of Gournay’s pesky intrusions:

> Mais la persecution de l’autre [Gournay] n’est pas supportable, & je vous jure que je n’aurois jamais dit de bien d’elle, si j’eusse sceü qu’elle vous assassinast ainsi de ses escritures. L’aurois par-là essayé de vous plaindre. La *** se voulut autrefois jouër à moy de cette sorte; mais je fus plus vaillant que vous, & me desfis d’elle courageusement. Elle tira mille fois à

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\(^{168}\) Letters from Chapelain to Gournay are further discussed in the next section.

\(^{169}\) The Marquise de Sablé was highly esteemed by Balzac and Chapelain. Chapleain speaks of her in “Lettre CCCXXII” to Balzac dated August 7, 1639.
faux, & je receuis un plein boisseau de billets, sans perdre pour cela ma muette gravité. C’est ainsi qu’il faut traiter cette espece de Dames, soit qu’elles soient Muses, soit qu’elles soient Fées, soit que vous aimiez mieux qu’elles soient Sibylles. Vous voyez mon ancienne façon d’agir, & je suis tout prest de faire encore pis, en cas de besoin. (Œuvres 806)

Gournay’s efforts to open and maintain channels of communications are couched in the life-threatening terms, “persecution” and “assassination”. Balzac, however, prides himself in being aware of Gournay’s scheme to “play him”, and proves more “valiant” than Chapelain. This hostile imagery continues, again echoing the “Damoiselle Carabine” of 1610, when Gournay “misfires” a thousand times, her bushel of notes missing their intended target as Balzac stands steadfast in mute solemnity. Balzac qualifies Gournay with the pejorative adjectival phrase “cette espece de Dames” when he advises Chapelain to treat all women of her type as he had, whether they be muses, fairies or prophets. No matter how inspirational, or valuable a woman can be then, she must be reprimanded if she enters into a male domain. Balzac concludes his guidance by offering to do even worse things, should Chapelain call for his aid. These Academicians exhibit the need to take some action to repress Gournay’s requests for discussion and the intrigue mounted between Balzac and Chapelain, both in their early forties, against Gournay, could furnish the language and plot for yet another farce.

In several other letters to Chapelain, dated from 1644 to 1646, Balzac would speak of Gournay in similar terms.170 In August 1644, he exasperatingly asks Chapelain what they should do about her. According to Balzac, she had complained, expressing

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170 The citations of letters from 1644 to 1646 are from Lettres.
shock at not having received a copy of a recent publication. In an attempt to justify her exclusion, he claims that he thought she was dead.

...outre que la dernière fois qu’elle m’escrivist elle me mandoit que c’ estoit pour la dernière fois, et qu’elle ne pensoit pas avoir le loysir d’attendre ma response en ce monde. Je la tenoïs femme de parolle, et me l’imaginois desjà habitante des champs Élysées; car, comme vous scavés, elle ne connoist point le sein d’Abraham, et n’eust jamais grande passion pour le Paradis. (160-161)

In addition to accusing Gournay of not being a “woman of her word” for not having died, Balzac brings into question her religious conviction. The passage is so harsh that the editor of the 1873 printing, Tamizey de Larroque, comments on the passage, qualifying it as cruel and [the letter] “si dure” (160 Note 5). It would appear that Gournay repeatedly asked both Balzac and Chapelain for a copy of the book and it became a subject of contention between them.

On August 22, 1644 Balzac writes (167) Chapelain that he is too ill to respond to Gournay’s most recent letter and so is forwarding it to him. A week later, Balzac writes again (169). “Quand il vous plaira, je verray dans un article de moins de six lignes le sujet que vous avez eu de vous desfaire de la fille d’alliance. J’entends les choses à demy mot, nec est, Capellane, necesse historiam scripsisse omnem”. This advice on how to get rid of Gournay does not refer to her by name, but instead it uses her self-appointed title which constitutes another feigned effort at restraint. Balzac’s enigmatic conclusion about veiled words and the need to tell the whole story add to previous tones of conspiracy.

against Gournay. The affair takes a turn for the worse in September 1644, when Balzac responds to an account about demands for his book that Chapelain had written him.¹⁷²

Je conclus de vostre récit, Monsieur, que la demoiselle est folle de présomption, et trouve que vous avez très bien fait de mortifier sa vanité, en lui refusant un honneur qu’elle exigeoit de vous incivillement. Elle m’eust fait très grand plaisir de se laisser mourir comme elle me l’avoit promis. Cette bonne action eust espargné un exemplaire à Rocolet, et à moy cinq ou six lignes qu’il faut que je luy escrire, puisqu’elle n’est pas assez mal avec vous pour m’obliger de rompre avec elle. (170-71)

The characteristics Balzac attributes to Gournay defy all rules of politeness of the time. To be qualified as presumptuous, vain and uncivil could be harmful enough to the social prestige of men and was devastating for women.

One might think that Balzac would be more sympathetic to Gournay given that he himself had been the target of a practical joke. According to Bibas and Butler, editors of Balzac’s Premières lettres (1933) both Gournay and Balzac were vain enough to fall victims of mystification. They compare (270-71) her tale of Copie with that of a prank, mounted by Ogier, who made Balzac believe that the king and princesses of Denmark had passed a judgement in his favor following a dispute with another writer. This incident, however, would do nothing to render him more available to Gournay. Balzac makes it clear that the only reason he has any contact with her at all is out of respect for Chapelain who is on better terms with her. A few contemporaries speak highly of Gournay, and Balzac conveys his incomprehension of them to Chapelain, complaining

¹⁷² Gournay was not the only one to make repeated requests for a copy of his book. In the same letter (169-170) Balzac is distressed by the many complaints he had received from those who had not been included in the distribution made directly from the editor, for which he blames his nephew. He says that all the protests and demands are beginning to make him hate his book.
that philosopher and Academician La Mothe le Vayer’s favorable comments on Gournay are “pour vous faire dépit” (236). In 1637, La Mothe le Vayer had published *Considérations sur l’Eloquence francoise de ce temps* in which he opposed “l’influence excessive des milieux mondains” and expressed concerns, similar to Gournay’s, about the influence of linguistic purism. The danger she represents for Balzac and Chapelain was manifested even after her death.

When Balzac compared the impressions by classical scholar and poet Nikolaes Heinsius (1620-1681) of himself and Gournay, his pride took a blow. In April 1646, less than a year after her death, he writes (369) to Chapelain that “je me suis veu dans son livre…mais ma vanité a esté un peu mortifée quand j’ay veu la demoiselle de Gournay aussi bien ou mieux traitée que moy.” Heinsius had written that “femme, elle était entrée en lice avec les hommes, et qu’elle les avait vaincus.” Balzac’s intrigues and vanity were amusing to some readers and he was in fact parodied himself in Du Peschier’s *Comédie des Comédies* (1629). His approach to fellow writers take on farcical overtones when read in conjunction with an incident in which he had two strongmen break into the room of a young man who had made light of him to “administer a correction.”

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173 François La Mothe le Vayer, *Considérations sur l’Eloquence francoise de ce temps* 2nd, (Paris; Augustin Courbe, 1647) Quoted by Adam (308).


175 Bertrand Bernard de Javerzac threw “quelques pointes du côté de Balzac” in *Discours d’Aristarque à Nicandre sur le jugement des esprits de ce temps*, 2nd ed. (Rouen, 1628). The story is recounted in Adam (251-52).
expressed about Gournay came from a perceived danger. The danger was not that of mockery which Balzac could deal with by physical violence. She was addressing him in a forum beyond the limits of her private sphere, pushing against the grain of the gendered practices of writing in early modern France. The bruises Gournay suffered were to her posterity and they would remain in ink long after Javerzac’s hematomes had faded.

**Jean Chapelain’s “irréconciliable ennemie de l’écorcheuse Académie”**

Jean Chapelain (1595-1674) writer, poet, literary critic, was the first president of the Academy. His epic poem on Jeanne d’Arc, *La Pucelle*, was a topic of discussion with Gournay. He does not rise to the acerbic level characteristic of Balzac in his impressions of Gournay and at times he is rather amiable, despite his cutting remarks. He was known as a good friend to many, even to the point of inconsistency. He flattered people, “même lorsqu’il ne les aimait pas” (Adam 234) in his search for patronage. It was perhaps this inconsistency that caused him to seek Gournay out, only to be then thankful that she was not at home. On November 28, 1632 he writes to Godeau,\(^\text{176}\) “Nous manquâmes heureusement la Demoiselle de Montaigne en la visite que M. Conrart et moy lui fismes…Je prie Dieu que nous le facions tousjours de mesme chés elle et que, sans nous perter aux insolences de Saint-Amand, nous en soyons aussi bien délivrés que luy” (10-  

\(^\text{176}\) Antoine Godeau, (1605-1672) was bishop of Grasse and Vence. In an interesting comment, Roosbroeck (27 Note 13) states that Godeau was anxious to have his poetry shown to the beaux esprits of the time. As he was related to the more established Conrart, he suggested that literary gatherings be held at Conrart’s home so that he could be present. “Thus Godeau may have been the indirect cause of the founding of the French Academy, of which he was one of the first members”.
12). Although Chapelain expressed the need to his contemporaries to free himself from Gournay, this did not prevent him from seeking her out privately. He wrote to her on December 10, 1632, less than two weeks after his letter to Godeau, to thank her for “le bon souvenir” of their visit (17). Chapelain’s great literary project was a poem on Jeanne d’Arc, *La Pucelle* (1656) and during his visit they spoke of it. To encourage him in his endeavor, Gournay sent him a copy of her poem “De la Pucelle d’Orleans, Jeanne d’Arc” (1628) for which he felt obliged to thank her. He lets her know that he already had a copy in the *Ombre* she had given him and that this project was not his “principale étude,” thereby devaluing her concerns.

More interestingly than this paradoxical attraction, the letter reveals some of the complexities of women in the publication culture. In 1625 an edition of *Les Essais* had appeared under Gournay’s supervision and in the early 1630’s she was preparing another edition which would appear in 1635. Chapelain gets news that Gournay will receive the royal patent granting her the permission to publish the *Essais* for a period of six years, and this despite his own political maneuvering to get the patent for himself.¹⁷⁷ He is furious when he writes Godeau:

> La philosophie ne s’accorde pas avec la marchandise et je n’aime pas que la fille du Grand Montaigne publie qu’elle ne fait réimprimer ses *Essais* que pour honorer sa mémoire…Il faut qu’elle souffre cette reprimande et que je lui reproche qu’elle n’est pas trop fille de Montaigne en ce point.
>

(12)

¹⁷⁷ Fogel (278) details how Chapelain had allied himself with Conrart, secretary to the king at the Chancellory and who signed more “privilèges” than any other secretary.
The hypocrisy is evident as he depicts Gournay’s work as a coarse shot at financial gain which, in itself, carried negative connotations in early modern France. Balzac had made a similar complaint about a new world order in a letter to Girard. In it he evokes the evolution in power structures based on economics rather than birth right, despondently saying that the world “estime les marchands & la banque” (Œuvres 257). Chapelain and Balzac were expressing what Bourdieu (22) calls the “entitlement effect.” They were members of the dominant social group, the aristocracy, through the essence of their cultural capital, both inherited and academic. Chapelain removes Gournay’s legitimacy, her access to entitlement, by associating her with a lower social group, the merchants.

Gournay, however, had been given legitimacy by royal approval and now had the power and authority to control the production, the *merchandise*, of a well-known and highly considered male-authored text. This position, although not completely unheard of, was very novel in early seventeenth-century France. As Broomhall’s investigation into the book trade in early modern France shows, most women had to justify their activities in the publishing milieu. They would present themselves with the formulaic expression of ‘widow of’ or with their maiden names, as daughters in printing families. If women did not make reference to their familial (male) connections to the trade, they risked financial ruin.\(^\text{178}\) Gournay herself was cognizant of this tactic and employed it in the title of her first publication, *Le Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne*. The reaction of her contemporaries did not diverge from the mentality that questioned women’s participation

\(^{178}\) This point is developed in Broomhall’s Chapter 2, “Women Working in the Book Trades” (45-70).
in print culture. Broomhall’s analysis (71) finds that “access to publication was structured by the interrelationship between material conditions and theoretical notions of female behavior.” Gournay’s motivations, too, were questioned even though she had received legitimacy from the king’s council to publish Montaigne’s *Essais*. She came from the lower nobility, but her family resources had been depleted and she did in fact need the income from her work to maintain a certain level of outward decorum. This commonplace bind was bolstered by the ever present notion that females were innately incompetent beings and should therefore not be put in charge of the editorial process.¹⁷⁹

Whereas many of the satires in which Gournay appeared made use of the mental construction linking chastity and silence which plagued women in general, Chapelain plays on a different register. He equates philosophy and “le Grand Montaigne” to that which is noble, lofty. Gournay’s status is lowered to that of a merchant, an outsider. She had created for herself, through the “heretical mode of acquisition” of autodidactism, the tools to usurp the authority and dignity of the master but falls “victim by default of the effects of educational entitlement” (Bourdieu 328-29). Chapelain makes her punishment for transgressing the boundary into an elite male forum unmistakeably clear in his letter to Godeau when he says, “il faut qu’elle souffre.” The ambiguity of their relationship continues throughout her lifetime and turns sour again in 1639 when Gournay submits the

¹⁷⁹ Numerous catalogs detailed female vices. The most recent at the time was Jacques Olivier, *L’Alphabet de l’imperfection et malice des femmes* (1617; Paris: Jean Oursel, 1683). It had aroused the long standing quarrel on sexual superiority. Chapter “B” (12-20) is entitled “*Bestiale baratrum* : abime de betise.”
expression *pendant ce soir* for judgment by the Academy. The expression is condemned and Chapelain writes to Gournay on the matter.

Vous êtes bonne de m’envoyer ainsi la paix; je la reçois de votre main, mais seulement pour les affaires générales; car pour nos différends particuliers, vous savez bien qu’ils ne sauroient finir, et que vous êtes l’irréconciliable ennemie de l’écorcheuse Académie. Je suis marié que vous ayez fait juger pendant ce soir par ce tribunal que vous ne connoissez pas. Outre que vous y avez été condamnée, vous leur donnez encore droit de vous citer quand bon leur semblera, ayant fait cet acte de reconnoissance…Je vous fais bonne guerre la vertu nous liant, nous ne pouvons avoir de querelle ensemble que pour des lettres et des syllabes. (497-498)

Chapelain acknowledges Gournay’s words of peace, apparently sent to him prior to this letter, but only on “general matters” and he has no intentions of trying to pacify their differences. Instead, she will forever remain the “irreconciliable enemy” of the Academy which she had supposedly characterized as *écorcheuse*. This qualification could very well have come from Gournay’s letter to him, if not, she would definitely agree that the Academy was stripping a wealth of words and expressions from the language.

Chapelain makes the peculiar statement that Gournay does not know the tribunal. Her appearance in the comedies described above attest to her acquaintance with the Academicians. More important is the fact that before the Academy was officially founded in 1635, many smaller groups met, “qui auraient mérité de prendre le nom d’Académie,” and as an example, Adam (220) cites Gournay, who “tenait chez elle des réunions périodiques de gens de lettres”. Michel Marolles, Abbé de Villeloin was one of Gournay’s closest friends. He writes (1:58) that her house was indeed a regular meeting place in the early 1620’s for men such as l’Estoile, La Mothe Le Vayer, Colletet, Cerisy,
Serisay, Malleville and Conrart, all future Academicians, as well the Ogier brothers and others. Marolles (3:289) credits Gournay’s home as the birthplace of the idea of an academy. “. . .Ce fut chez cette honnête Demoiselle, où se conçut la première idée de l’Académie française, par tous ceux qui la visitaient tous les jours.” As Feugère notes, “à la naissance de l’Académie française, les membres de ce corps illustre ne dédaignèrent pas de se rassembler plusieurs fois chez elle” (163).

Émile Magne (19) states that Gournay railed incessantly against the assembly. René Bray\(^{180}\) mentions her alignment with Régnier against Malherbe as does Ferdinand Brunot (531, 535). Brunot’s chapter on “L’Opposition à Malherbe” (531-562) details Gournay’s disagreements with the new school. His description leaves no doubt that she grasped the implications of the Academy’s proceedings.

Ayant vécu au milieu des amis de Malherbe, dans une société qu’ils faisaient retentir de leurs discussions littéraires et grammaticales, elle [Gournay] sait même distinguer dans toutes les difficultés soulevées, celles qui viennent du maître et celles qui viennent des disciples; elle voit bien que les plus exagérés sont comme toujours les derniers venus...elle ne laisse guère moyen de se méprendre. Les théories qu’elle combat sont celles de Malherbe, point par point, et toutes les allusions sont aussi claires que possible. (555)

More recently, Noiset (Gournay 119-148) and Fogel (260-83) recount the complexities of different literary alliances and highlight Gournay’s analysis of the society which was giving birth to language reforms. Based on these discussions of Gournay’s engagement in literary quarrels during the beginning of the seventeenth century, Chapelain’s comment about Gournay “not knowing” the Academy reveals more bad faith than truth. This

assertion represents another containment strategy for Gournay’s perceived subversions of male practices. He tries to make her appear ignorant of the Academy’s affairs and by doing so he renders her request to the forum petty. By extension her linguistic theories matter little and are undeserving of attention and she, as a person, is thus rendered excentric. Chapelain also shows himself fully aware of the social stigma attached to women who fall into the public eye. He tells her that the attention she brought upon herself by asking that “pendant ce soir” be judged gives the Academicians the right to cite her whenever they please. This is a case of the victim being found guilty for the crime. Any humiliation she should subsequently suffer from this case is a direct consequence of her own actions.

Chapelain finishes his letter stating that theirs was a fair fight, the only quarrel being over questions of “letters” and “syllables.” At face value, the differences between Gournay and Chapelain are thus rendered inconsequential and are not to be taken seriously. But the plural of “letter,” as defined by the 1694 Dictionnaire de l’Académie, is the key to Chapelain’s phrase.

On appelle Lettres au pluriel, Toute sorte de sciences & de doctrine. Les belles lettres. les lettres humaines. les saintes lettres. un homme de lettres. la republique des lettres. le Roy François I. a esté appelé le Pere des lettres, favorisoit les lettres, a fait refleurir les lettres. cet homme a beaucoup d'esprit, mais il n'a point de lettres.

“Letters” are the raison d’être for Gournay, Chapelain and all those who evolve in the literary world. They are the basis for their financial well-being and social status. Gournay and Chapelain are both passionate about language and literature. In short, letters
represent their entire lives. For the two to be separated by questions of letters, is for them to be forever divided on all levels of existence.

“ILLUSTRIOUS” WOMEN AND THE WEIGHT OF HABITUS

In sharp contrast to the unfavorable receptions of Gournay presented, different memoires and compilations of illustrious women published between 1647 and 1698 pay tribute to her as a person and as a woman of letters. These works are often cited as evidence that Gournay was admired by many of her contemporaries. One could think, then, based on the rapid succession of these accolades following her death, that Gournay’s reception evolved rather quickly and in a positive fashion after 1645. An analysis of them, though, reveals more hidden or denied forms of male domination and exploitation, Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence.” Study of the passages relevant to Gournay illustrate that the dominant (male) vision of female practices was inscribed in the discourses of both men and women. While it is evident that Gournay’s harsh or cruel reception was constructed through commonplace patriarchal beliefs about women’s roles and positions in society, there exists a hidden side to the praises put forth to honor and defend her. Both bodies of texts, the negative and the laudatory, are grounded in the same political, social and psychological assumptions about authority, power, and who should be included in the “Temple of taste” (as Sainte-Beuve would call it later). The different authors’ intent to display a prominent woman in a favorable light is not in question here. When Pelletier wrote that temples should be constructed for Gournay, he was indeed expressing his admiration for her. It is the contention that all of Gournay’s friends, well-
wishers and defenders held the conviction that they were favorably promoting Gournay’s legacy, or at the least, presenting an honest portrait of a literary woman whose works were of interest. What can be revealed in an analysis of the texts by a reader today, however, is that Gournay’s reception following her death in 1645 remained anchored to the weight of habitus, the unquestioned principles which govern thought and action.

Marolles’ and Sorel’s memories of cette bonne fille

One admirer was Marolles and when he speaks of Gournay in his Mémoires (1656) it is with affection. As he states (1:58), he visited her often and always had great esteem for her. Yet he seems also to justify all of his praises, either by allusions to the opinions of others or with a double-edged comment. If Gournay is a worthy conversationalist it is because the Duke of Retelois found in her “un de ses grands divertissements: & quoy qu’il fust d’une humeur assez galante, si est-ce qu’il n’y avoit point de Dame qu’il n’eust quittée pour entretenir celle-cy” (1:58). For the duke, she is mostly an object of amusement, like one of his history books mentioned by Marolles. He comments about Gournay’s lack of physical beauty compared to her spiritual beauty and that “cette bonne fille” knew many things women did not know. But of Gournay’s writings he states little:

Nous avons plusieurs ouvrages de sa façon en prose & en vers, qui sont recueillis en un seul volume, qu’elle fit imprimer de son temps, & l’a intitulé, Presents de la Damoiselle de Gournay. Ceux qui l’ont voulu railler, n’ont pas trouvé sujet de s’en glorifier, & plusieurs grands personages luy ont donné des loüanges pendant sa vie, & apres sa mort...(1:58)
As we note, there is no description of the content or merit of her work, only that they were done in her own way, *de sa façon*, a polite way of being noncommittal. What follows this passage is one twice its length, where Marolles criticizes those who spoke ill of her by enumerating all the “scavants homm es” who visited her. His final comment is touching though. After listing her friends, he adds “si je ne me trompe, elle me faisoit l’honneur de me mettre en ce nombre là.” This sentence alone, in its straightforward honesty, does more to promote Gournay as a worthy person and companion than the exalted representations of her as a muse of ancient times found in her epitaphs.

Charles Sorel’s *Bibliothèque française* (1664) provides descriptions and explanations of the works he considers as the best examples of French language and literature. Gournay is mentioned in different places, but in relation men, Dupleix, Montaigne and Malherbe, or due to her opposition to language reform. Scipion Dupleix wrote *Liberté de la Langue Française* (1650) in which he protests against language purification. When Sorel criticizes him for not recognizing the importance of usage in language, he adds, “on peut dire qu’en cela il estoit de l’humeur de la bonne Demoiselle de Gournay” (21). He writes of her and a few of her treatises as an introduction to Montaigne because, as he states, it will hardly hurt. “Il ne sera point mal à propos mesme de nous entretenir auparavant de sa fille d’Alliance, la Docte et Vertueuse Demoiselle de Gournay” (79). He gives the frank assessment that her *Advis* has not been accorded enough critical attention because of its antiquated language and metaphors. He emphatically encourages people to read her essays. “Qu’ils prennent garde aux traitez *de l’Education & de l’Institution des Princes*... & a beaucoup d’autres sujets Moraux &
Politiques” (79-80). If people examine the meaning, rather than the words, Sorel contends, they will discover the sound judgement of this “illustre fille.” A reader of the seventeenth century might find this commentary unexpected, especially after reading his Rôle des presentations, for there is not the long list of prominent admirers which normally justify Gournay’s place in compilations.

Sorel is quick to state why he has included twenty-five lines on Gournay in his chapter on language usage. It is because of the preface she wrote for her covenant father. “C’est pourquoy il y a eu d’autant plus de sujet de parler de ses Ouvrages, avant que de s’arrester entierement à ceux de Montaigne” (80). For Sorel then, Gournay does not rise to the level of a subject worthy of analysis on her own, but by her association with Montaigne. There is no chapter on Gournay in his Bibliothèque. She is not even accorded a subheading even though “quelques Gens ont crû qu’elle avoit raison” in her comment that Malherbe’s writing was a “bouillon d’eau claire” (259-60). Sorel also speaks of her in De la Connoissance des bons livres (1671) when describing how certain words fell out of usage. She is “la bonne Demoiselle,” one of the “Filles d’esprit” who deserves such a title (377). Yet, according to him, Gournay’s knowledge is not what makes her noteworthy. “Au dessus de son sçavoir je voudrois mettre encore sa generosité, sa bonté & ses autres Vertus” (377). This comment functions on two levels, neither of which contribute to future receptions of Gournay as an independent literary figure. Sorel’s use of the terms “generosity,” “goodness” and “virtues” is inclusionary in that these attributes resituate Gournay among women, as they are qualities which were commonly ascribed to respectable women. She is portrayed as a moral, upright figure. Cultural boundaries
prohibit a virtuous woman from being a public figure who engages in debates and makes a living by writing. So, by placing these qualities “above” Gournay’s intellectual acumen, Sorel excludes her from the characteristics which would make a good philosopher, writer or perceptive critic. She is returned to the socially inferior group of “good” women who are, by definition, silent.

**Hilarion de Costes’ “oracle”**

De Coste’s compilation of prominent women, *Les Éloges et les vies des reynes, des princesses, et des dames illustres en Piété, en Courage & en Doctrine* (1647) is the richest work of this type in biographical details. It extols the virtues of notable women with an eloquent style. “Si plusieurs sçavans hommes ont écrit à la loüange de cette tres-docte Heroïne de son vivant, je croy estre obligé de luy consacrer cet eloge après sa mort” (668). His section on Gournay (668-72) gives first a brief mention of her family history and then a long list of those who admired her.

Des sa naissance les Muses & les Graces luy firent un si favorable accueil, que plusieurs Princes & Seigneurs de ce Royaume l’ont infiniment estimée : & les plus polis & les plus doctes personnages de l’Europe l’ont respectée & honorée comme un Oracle. (668)

This lofty introduction furnished by Coste is flattering. He mentions the many different people with Gournay she corresponded and the fact that their letters were found at her house after her death, thus corroborating their existence. Unfortunately, very few of these letters remain.
One statement refers to her status as a self-taught *savante* (669). “Aussi elle passoit les jours & les nuits en l’étude des belles sciences. Cette fille n’ignoroit rien de tout ce qui rend les hommes sçavants.” This depiction of Gournay spending her days and nights studying lends itself to an appreciation of the arduous nature of Gournay’s accomplishments which was its likely intended purpose. Coste’s portrayal, though, reveals an underlying, albeit unintentional, adherence to the entitlement effect. The impression is that Gournay had to devote her every waking hour to acquire her “belles sciences,” whereas men of letters were born *a priori* into knowledge that was perfected with instruction and discussions “au fond des cabarets,” as was written about Saint-Amant (Magne 19). In addition, the proximity of the qualifications of “cette fille” with that of “hommes sçavants” points to an embodied, unconscious belief that Gournay was operating on a different, lower plane than her male contemporaries. Coste cites *Ombre* by name and adds that the title was changed to *Avis*. Although he gives no description of her work, he does say that it had several publications. He concludes his entry with epitaphs by Ogier and Colletet and sonnets by La Mothe le Vayer and Pelletier, composed at her death.\(^{181}\) The aim of *Éloge* is not to provide a literary critique but, as its name claims, to give praise, to eulogize. Coste does just that and his article displays some marked reverence for the “tres-docte Heroïne”.

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\(^{181}\) These poems are presented in a later section of this chapter.
Marguerite Buffet’s flawed copy

Marguerite Buffet’s *Nouvelles Observations...avec les éloges des illustres scéavantes* (1668) is an anthology of notable women, containing passages of their respective works and remarks on French grammar. She includes a meager paraphrase of Coste’s entry on Gournay, with some sentences lifted word for word. To Coste’s “elle passait les jours & les nuits en l’étude des belles sciences” (669), Buffet adds (291) “cette savante fille a sacrifié le plus beau de sa vie à l’étude des belles lettres”. Buffet’s is not a meanspirited comment. Far from it. It highlights Gournay’s devotion to letters and illustrates the current of positive reception she had in the second half of the seventeenth century. The intent here, in this analysis, is to demonstrate how reception functions as a dialectical relationship between a present day reader and a past discourse. Jauss explains (247) the relation by saying that the text can only say something to the reader “si le sujet présent découvre la réponse implicite contenue dans le discours passé et la perçoit comme réponse à une question qui lui appartient, à lui, de poser maintenant”.

The “response” that Buffet’s entry lends itself today is that the author, through her discourse, betrays her submission to the very principles she aimed to subvert. Buffet wants to show that women, like men, possess the capacities to rise to a level of intellectual brillance worthy of praise. In doing so, though, she resorts to copying a male text. The practice of copying others’ mémoires, with changes, additions and embellishments was common. Tallemant for instance relied on many other texts when constructing *Historiettes*, as did Pasquier in *Recherches*. The idea that information came
from another text is not the source of contention here, but the poor quality of her copy, as Coste’s exalted language falls flat in Buffet’s entry:


Missing are the details which make Coste’s work so vivid. The one addition that Buffet does make, “elle a sacrifiée le plus beau de sa vie,” discloses her alliance to the exterior and subordinate position of women. It was because Gournay could never fully participate in the field of male practices in which power was at stake (Bourdieu’s concept of illusio), that she sacrificed her life to letters rather than, for example, enriched or devoted her life. In so doing, Buffet’s text shows an implicit acceptance of exclusion from the social games of men.

Jean de la Forge’s “Sçavante Geminie”: the Other circle

La Forge’s introductory letter to Cercle des femmes sçavantes (1663) is addressed to his “lectrices” because, as he reasons, his work is written almost entirely for them. He dedicates Cercle to Gilonne d’Harcourt, Comtesse de Fiesque, from whom he was possibly seeking patronage. He does not indicate who the other, smaller, audience may include, nor does he advance the idea that men may find his text of interest. He praises his female contemporaries, in verse, and they were most likely flattered that he had composed Cercle just for them. La Forge refers to all the women as “Sçavantes”, or

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182 This introduction, “Aux Lectrices” does not have page numbers.
“Protectrices des Scavans”. He uses poetic pseudonyms for the expressed purpose of elegance, giving a key to their true identities at the end of the poem.

Gournay appears (10) as “Geminie.” “La docte Geminie, Axiane, & Candace, / Aspireront comme elle [Madeleine de Souvré, Marquise de Sablé] aux faveurs du Parnasse, / Et trouveront sans doute en ce temps peu d’Esprits / Qui produisent au jour de plus rares écrits”. La Forge informs (D-D ij) the reader of the names of the women, sometimes offering up a reason for their respective inclusions. He says that the Marquise de Sablé was a great patron of letters. “Axiane” is Madame la Vicomtesse d’Auchy, who wrote on Saint Paul, and “Candace” is Mademoiselle de Cosnard, author of the tragedy, *Les Chastes Martyrs* (1650). The entry on “Geminie” (D-Dij) reads “Marie des Jars Demoiselle de Gournay. Je croirois faire tort à toutes les personnes qui se meslent du commerce des Sciences, si je pretendois leur apprendre quelle est cette celebre Fille; & je pense qu’il n’y en a pas une qui n’ait lu ce beau Livre d’avis qu’elle a donné au public.” La Forge does not give much information about any of the women in *Cercle* and this entry on Gournay avoids any real qualification or evaluation. The reader is left to conjecture as to the meaning of “Geminie.” The term, as used by La Forge, can possibly be a form of “geminate,” from Latin, *geminare* “to double, repeat,” and related to *geminus*, “twin.” Although there are no textual indications that Gournay is a “double,” a reflection, or copy of Montaigne, it remains a possible inference. If this is the case, she becomes part of the *Other* circle, constructed as the twin of a male figure. La Forge assumes that, as everyone knows this famous “Fille,” no more needs to be said, the term
finne, refering both to her status of Montaigne’s “fille d’alliance” and that of an unmarried woman. To Gournay’s credit, he does reference *Advis*, in “ce beau Livre d’advis”.

La Forge’s introductory letter is careful to state that he makes no comparison between the women and that the order of presentation is based on “la contrainste des Vers, & la diversité des temps.” Nonetheless Gournay’s grouping with these particular women is odd as the quality, quantity and range of her work far exceeds those with whom she is cited. For example, once Sablé became a widow, she became a respected *salonnière* prompting Tallemant (1:514) to say “elle a bien de l’esprit.” Like Gournay, her family fortune was depleted but Sablé did not attempt to earn a living by writing. Instead, in a sort of self-imposed exile, she entered the Port-Royal convent where she spent the last twenty-three years of her life, surrounding herself with *beaux esprits* and actively involved in court intrigues.¹⁸³

Her 1870 editor, Jouaust (IX-X), advances that Sablé was not a writer at all because she never intended *Maximes* to be published. She wrote because she enjoyed this “jeu de société,” an activity in which many of her contemporaries participated. Her work was put out for publication after her death in 1678 by Father Ailly. Although thankful to Father Ailly for bringing Sablé’s *Maximes* to the attention of the public, Jouaust (X) recognizes that this action was a means for Ailly to publish his own maxims which he included in the volume. Auchy and Cosnard, on the other hand, restricted their writings to religious topics. They participated in salons and maintained respectability, even though

¹⁸³ Adam tells of her desire to exclude Richelieu from the entourage of Marie de Médicis (*Historiettes* 1:1148 Note 1).
they published, because religious subject matters such as the lives of saints and martyrs were suitable venues for women. They did not openly display their knowledge, adhering to the saying that an “honnête femme” (ou homme) should “ne se piquer de rien”. Sablé gained acceptance into the forum of “illustrious” women by virtue of her retreat into a convent upon widowhood and her lack of ambition to enter the public eye through her works. She did display ambition, but hers was on the level of intrigues and amorous relations, not print or politics. Adam (1146 Note 5) speaks of Sablé’s well-known beauty as does Jouaust (II). “Jolie, et partout réputée pour l’être, comblée d’hommages [qui] s’adressaient en même temps à son esprit et à sa beauté”. Sablé may indeed have corresponded to seventeenth-century ideals of beauty but what can be distilled from the passages of La Forge’s Cercle on Gournay is that it was the body of her work that was respected but that her life was possibly too unconventional to address. This is in great contrast to the other women cited along with her, who worked on the social graces expected of women of their standing and whose texts were either unintentional, or minor. Unlike Gournay, the lifestyles of the other “illustrious” women were conventional or suited to cultural expectations.

In other terms, Sablé, Auchy and Cosnard possessed more “gender capital,” an element in Bourdieu’s socially constructed and gender differentiated habitus (Domination 55). These three women were rewarded by their contemporaries for having recognized and acknowledged the social and literary practices suitable to their sex. They participated in the illusio, life’s social games, through proxy, by accepting the differentiated socialization which predisposed them to serve men in power. Conversely, Gournay, who
adopted masculine attitudes, such as ambition, was misrecognized by her peers and thus reprimanded and made to appear unfeminine, ugly and even, by extension, immoral, by her detractors.

**Verbal dexterity and Jacquette Guillaume’s taming of “savants”**

Jacquette Guillaume put out another work about great women, *Les Dames illustres, ou Par bonnes & fortes raisons, il se prouve, que le Sexe Féminin surpasse en toute forte de genres le Sexe Masculin* (1665). As the complete title indicates, Guillaume’s work belongs to the current of texts in the querelle des femmes which take up the defense of women by trying to prove their superiority. As such, her analysis of Gournay is so laudatory, there are clear embellishments of her abilities, most notably when she states (405) that Gournay spoke perfect Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Gournay read Latin well, as seen by her numerous translations, notably the twelve hundred or so citations in the Essais. Worth-Stylianou (1:79) maintains that Gournay’s translations are the least contested part of her works. “Elle [Gournay] semble avoir trouvé un terrain qui lui permette de concilier son érudition, son amour démesuré des Essais et du style poétique du siècle précédent, et le besoin de se distinguer parmi ses contemporains.” Yet while she also translated *Vie de Socrate* by Diogenes Laertius from Greek, she admitted to having great difficulties in doing so. Her translation of Laertius also serves as a point of entry to introduce Socrates in “De l’Impertinente amitié” (1:1040-54). Gournay never spoke or wrote letters in these languages, out of lack of practice and confidence. In Copie (2:1862-3) she speaks of “neglecting” Greek because it was harder to learn than she had
first imagined and in Apologie a passage in the anecdote of the “Trois Racans” in Tallemant plays on this point.

As a prelude to her entry on Gournay, Guillaume justifies (291-92) her remarks, citing at length the letter in which Lipsius speaks of her as a woman of merit. According to Guillaume, Lipsius’s letter confirms “qu’elle estoit en si grande reputation d’esprit, d’eloquence, & de doctrine, qu’elle pouvoit fermer la bouche aux plus scavants hommes ce ce siecle”. This description of Gournay does much to explain the hostility and ambivalence she encountered. In the collective unconscious, the image of a woman manipulating men with verbal dexterity expressed a deep-seated fear of the loss of power, often portrayed in tales and emblem books, with didactic intent.\textsuperscript{184} Gilles Corrozet expresses this fear in “Complexion de femme,” (1540) a poem written to accompany an anonymous engraving showing a woman with an olive branch in her right hand and a sword in her left. He explains the engraving by a metaphor in which the sword becomes the woman’s tongue.

\begin{quote}
Elle a l’esprit elle a la langue prompte,
Dont les plus fortz & puissantz elle dompte,
S’elle ne faict guerre & occision
Elle en sera au moins occasion,
Car son parler a une telle force
Qu’à batailler les hommes elle efforce. (L\textsuperscript{4}v)\textsuperscript{185}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{184} Gilles Corrozet, \textit{Hecatomgraphie}, ed. John Horden (1540; London: Scolar Press, 1974). Corrozet says in his prefatory epistle that he wants to show vice and virtue so that “l’oeil choisisse / Vertu tant belle & delaisse le vice…” (A\textsubscript{3}).

\textsuperscript{185} Most pages in \textit{Hecatomgraphie}, an emblem book, are not numbered. However, “Complexion” directly follows L\textsubscript{4}, “Estre cause de son mal.”
Women then, if given the opportunity, will tame even the strongest men. A similar representation is found in Bonaventure des Périers (c. 1500-1544), poet, satirist and secretary to Marguerite de Navarre. In his tale, “Of the Professor who Fought a Fishwife from the Petit Pont with Fine Insults,” a professor of the collège de Montaigu is humiliated by a fishwife’s verbal superiority. Périers concludes his tale by saying, “Pour certain il a esté trouvé que, quand il eust eu un chalepin, un vocabulaire, un dictionnaire, un promptuaire, un tresor d’injures, il n’eust pas eu le premier de cette diablesse.” The fishwife had succeeded in throwing the established relations of power into chaos. To maintain the order of the world, women, who have demonic powers, must be silent. Gournay was not and she was vilified.

In her entry, Guillaume views Gournay through a category of perception imposed by male structures, which functions to maintain social power. She plays into the image of the woman who, if given the opportunity to speak, will shut men up. This category of thought is composed of pairs of opposites, such as active/passive, public/private. Gournay constantly overturned this system of dualities. She was public when women were supposed to be private and outspoken when she was expected to be silent. Her life was an

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187 “And, to be sure, it was felt that, even if he’d had a Calepin, a word list, a dictionary, a promptbook, a thesaurus of insults, he wouldn’t have had the last word against that she-devil” (159). The French text is also in Sara Matthews-Grieco, Ange ou diablesse: la représentation de la femme au XVf siècle (Paris: Flammarion, 1991) 311.
engagement against symbolic violence, the inculcated social structures and ways of
thinking that entice the dominated to contribute to their own domination. Guillaume, on
the other hand, tacitly accepts the symbolic efficacy of the negative stereotype of the
“femme qui parle.”

**HONORS UPON DYING: VENTRiloQUY AND THE MANIPULATION OF VOICE**

Beginning in 1626, Gournay adds a final notice to her collected works in which
she expressly forbids any alteration of her texts, including the preface of *Essais*, under
penalty of being held as “violateurs d’un sepulcre innocent” (2:1864). This notice
demonstrates her concern for her reputation and for posterity. Gournay would do likewise
shortly before her death. On March 7, 1645 she called her notaries, Plastrier and
Chapelain, to her home to draw up a codicil to her testament (2:1961-2). Among the
additions, Gournay specifies that two hundred pounds be given to Nicole Jamyn to cover
burial costs, one hundred of which to go for her tombstone. She dictates the material,
limestone, and the simplest of inscriptions “Y git Marie de Jars damoiselle de Gournay”
(2:1962). Gournay had first wanted to be buried at the Saint Severin church, where her
father and maternal grandfather were, but no tombstone could be found bearing either the
Jars or Hacqueville name. She would have to change her resting place to Saint Eustache.
Yet her punctiliousness in matters of self-fashioning would be further thwarted following
her death. The exact site of her grave at Saint Eustache church is unknown but the
*Épitaphier du vieux Paris* gives the inscription as it was recorded (230).

*Maria Gornacensis, quam Montanus*
ille filiam Justus Lipsius, adoeque omnes
docti sororem agnoeverunt.
Vixit annos 80, devixit 13 julii anno 1645.
Umbra aeternum victura.

“À Marie de Gournay que Montaigne appelait sa fille, Juste Lipse et tous les doctes leur
soeur. Elle a vécu quatre-vingts ans. Elle est décédée le 13 juillet de l’an 1645. L’ombre
sera victorieuse pour l’éternité” (Fogel 10). De Coste (670) attribue l’inscription à
François Ogier, un longtemps ami. Les critiques du XXe siècle tendent à voir cette
alteration favorable. Fogel, par exemple, n’envisage aucune supposition quant à
comment Gournay aurait réagi à ce changement, mais ses commentaires lui permettent
suggérer une interprétation positive de l’intervention d’Ogier.

En même temps que de nom, Marie a changé de famille: fille de
Montaigne, sujet des rois de France, soeur de Lipse, un grand lettré qui a
vécu aux Pays-Bas espagnols et aux Provinces-Unies, elle est adoptée par
“tous” les érudits contemporains. La voici projetée dans un autre univers:
le temps, l’espace et les frontières sont abolis, seule existe une
communauté de penseurs. (10)

The image que Fogel créé est utopien à l’écoute des termes tels que “univers autre”
and “community of thinkers” are used to describe Gournay’s afterlife. Her eternity takes
the form a of “Philosophers without Borders” in which she evolves with all scholars.

Ilsley’s view of Ogier’s change is even more explicit when she
claims (262) that the new inscription would have “touched Marie as it united her name
forever with those two men on whom she had bestowed her undying admiration and
whose friendship she had prized above all else.” Undeniably, her relationship with
Montaigne and his works contributed to her growth as a person and a writer more than any
other single factor. Her contribution to the Essais has provided some of the most fruitful
subjects of enquiry in the gournayen catalog of research. During her lifetime, it was
indeed Gournay’s respective relationships with Lipsius, and especially Montaigne, that
bolstered her reputation and gave her access to the literary world. The reciprocity of their
letters demonstrates one of the fundamental themes in Gournay’s creation of her myth,
that only the sage understands the sage.

Yet despite Gournay’s repeated maneuvers to fashion herself as the heiress of
Montaigne’s legacy, and despite her self-portraiture as an autodidact who had attained the
competency required to translate any Latin philosopher or historian, who had promoted
herself to some of the most powerful and influential people of her time, she purposefully
chose the most modest of inscriptions, “Here lies Marie de Jars, lady of Gournay.” Gone
is the self-created myth of the androgynous epic hero of Pincture as her intended
inscription confirms her status to the world as the daughter of Guillaume le Jars and her
intense longing to uphold what she considered the Gournay heritage, the connection to
the Gournay-sur-Aronde land. We should also stress that her language of choice for this
confirmation is French, a language she cherished. Despite her respect of classical writings
and her love of the richness of Renaissance poetry, Gournay herself was not the
anachronism she is often made out to be. Her treatises on education and equality point to
the contrary, that she was in fact very forward thinking. Her simple inscription in French,

188 For example see the collections of essays in Jean-Claude Arnould, ed., Marie de
Gournay et l’édition de 1595 des Essais de Montaigne. Actes du colloque de la Siam de juin 1995
(Paris: Champion, 1996) and BSAM 7.1-3 (1996); or Montaigne et Marie de Gournay, Actes du
far more widely understood than Latin, was a projection of herself to future generations. She was searching to be understood by those who passed her way after she was gone.

After a life filled with many accomplishments, some disastrous detours and some dead ends, Gournay had come full circle, completing a retour aux sources to the family and the place where her life as a woman of letters, as Marie de Gournay, had begun. She had endeavored to fulfill her life as best she could and wanted, in her final text, to establish her own authority, separate and independent from that of the canon of the intellectual literary elite. In 1623 she had published Promenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne under the title, Alinda, histoire tragique, possibly looking to forge her own name apart from Montaigne. However, she would change the title back to Promenoir in 1626 and all later editions. It is my belief, here, that Gournay was acknowledging and embracing her past work for what is was, a text of her youth, just as she had done when she reintroduced her 1595 preface in the 1599 edition of Promenoir. One cannot deny that Ogier’s text was intended as a compliment, with its use of auctores and Latin, both of which were methods employed by Gournay herself, throughout her career. It could be argued that Gournay’s final epitaph by Ogier was her own doing, that it was a product of the success of her self-fashioning as Montaigne’s daughter and his literary heiress. However, after her death she no longer wished to validate herself through the power of the other, but to stand on her own.

As forthright and painstakingly methodical as Gournay was as a writer and editor, it is impossible to imagine that there was any ambiguity in her mind as to what she wanted carved on her tombstone. Once again, nevertheless, as in the comedies in which
she appears, Gournay is made to speak by someone else, becoming the passive instrument of ventriloquy. The argument put forth here is that when Gournay could no longer physically control the final edition of her text, it was repudiated. Gournay is not actively creating herself, but as Fogel says, “la voici projetée.” Gournay is propelled by others into a universe where time, space and frontiers are abolished, for her, not by her. She was not the type of individual who would appreciate being projected by others into a space she had not created for herself. “Je défends à toute personne, telle qu’elle soit, d’y adjouster, diminuer, ny changer jamais aucune chose, soit aux mots ou en la substance” (2:1864). Her final words of Advis could not have been any clearer. She wrote with intention and condemned any effort, except her own, to modify her texts once printed. Ogier had known Gournay since the early 1620’s, attending discussions at her home. She thought highly of him and had sought him out for advice on a translation of Cicero. There was mutual respect between them since Gournay, in her “Advis sur la traduction de la seconde Philippique de Ciceron,” states (2:1469) that Ogier gave her “de bons advis,” and Ogier himself would write in a 1661 preface to Marolles’ Héroïdes about an “Academie des beaux Esprits, qui se tenoit…, dans la chambre de la Damoiselle de Gournay, vostre bonne amie et la mienne.”

189 My emphasis. Arnould (1469, Note C) calls attention to this epistle to Héroïdes. Gournay highly appreciated Ogier’s contribution. “. . . j’ay receu de bons advis en ceste Traduction: et qui se peut vanter, que dans la notable cognoissance qu’il apporte en ces affaires ou mysteres de l’antiquité, plusieurs parties et diverses facultez de l’esprit et de la Doctrine sont comprises . . .” (2:1469).
The act of replacing an inscription of his own, for Gournay’s, was not a malicious act by Ogier, but an unconsciously determined one. The substitution of his own text was the consequence of principles of social organization and practice that were based on gender, wealth and status. In the end, what Gournay had intended to say was excised, both physically and metaphorically. Her words were voiced over with no palimpsestic trace of the original. There was no regard to the merit of her text, or more importantly in this case, for its context as her dying wishes. Her final request was not honored and she as a person was negated, and in this case, for eternity.

**Guillaume Colletet’s “sibyl”**

Several other distinguished men of the time wrote to honor Gournay. Among them, Colletet, Pelletier and La Mothe le Vayer, father and son.\(^{190}\) For the most part, these epigrams and sonnets use the commonplace themes found in the prose works on Gournay, such as her great knowledge and her relationship with Montaigne and Justus Lipsius. Colletet includes “Sur la mort de Marie le Jars, Damoiselle de Gournay” in his *Epigrammes du sieur Colletet* (1653).

\[
\text{Si l’on a tant chanté la vertu des Sibylles,} \\
\text{Et fait passer leurs jours pour des siècles tranquilles,} \\
\text{Pour montrer leur merite, & l’heur qu’elles ont eu;} \\
\text{Tu remportes, GOURNAY, cet illustre avantage} \\
\text{D’égaler en mourant les Sibylles en âge,} \\
\text{Et d’avoir en vivant surmonté leur vertu. (74)}
\]

\(^{190}\) These can be found in De Coste (670-672) and Ilsley (296-298). Quotations of Pelletier and Le Vayer are from De Coste.
Even in a text that was specifically written to honor Gournay at her death, she could not escape a passing remark on age. In this instance, she could either be viewed as timeless, or simply, as old as ancient Greece or Rome.

Sibyls were women renowned for their gift of prophecy. Gods spoke through them. It was Sibyls who were said to guard the temple of Apollo, the god of poetic inspiration whom Gournay often praised, from *Bienvenue* in 1608 to “A Monsieur l’Abbé de Bois-Robert” in 1634. Colletet refers then to Sibyls but does not specifically give Gournay the gift of an oracle or prophet. She is equated with them in age only. Following this reasoning, her lifetime achievement was to have been as old as the Sibyls when she died and more virtuous than them when alive. Her worthiness is then in direct proportion to the longevity of her virtue. Another interpretation is that Gournay herself is a Sibyl, the guardian of the works of Montaigne. It is her service to a god-like figure that is prized. Montaigne could then speak through Gournay who does not rise to the level of a creator of texts herself, but again is made to speak. She is the instrument through which a male voice is heard.

**Pelletier’s monument of “estime publique”**

Pelletier’s sonnet, “Pour feuë MADEMOISELLE DE GOURNAY,” appeared in Hilarion de Coste’s *Éloge* in 1647. He also frames his praise within the context of ancient times, but in a much subtler fashion. His sonnet is a plea to carve a magnificent monument in ancient marble to honor her. Pelletier, now that Gournay is deceased,
reverses the typical expectation that women should not seek the public eye. He asks that the marble be carved so beautifully that the world recognize her worthiness:

Que le cizeau travaille après ce monument,
Faites qu’il soit orné de quelque marbre antique;
Que tout ce que votre art a de plus magnifique
En faveur de GOURNAY soit mis en ornement.
Tout ce qu’un bel esprit peut avoir de charmant
Tout ce qui peut gagner une estime publique
Fait que son nom par tout est un nom heroïque,
Par tout la Renommée en parle hautement. […]
Ses vertus, son sçavoir se trouvent sans exemples,
Vous pouvez pour quelque autre élever un cerceuil,
Mais pour elle il faudroit ne bastir que des Temples.

It is of interest to note that she is not only lauded for her bel esprit whose qualification as charmant is somewhat condescending, but more importantly for her exquisite tombstone. It is the carver, through his work, who is asked to render her name heroic.

Le Vayer’s epitaphs: the alliance of phyical and spiritual beauty

François La Mothe le Vayer (1585-1672) was a longtime friend of Gourlay’s to whom she willed her correspondence, “deux petits sacs de papiers curieux” and her own copy of Advis. The purpose of that gift was so that he could protect the integrity of her works: “affin que s’il arrivoit quelque doubte en son esprit ou en celuy de ses amis sur quelque difficulté d’intelligence de ce livre par erreur d’impression ou autrement il puisse ou desire prendre la peine de le resoudre par la verité de cet exemplaire pauvre orphelin que sa mere commet en mourant . . .” (2: 1957). The three poems written by Le Vayer and his son, Abbé La Motte le Vayer, touch on the themes of Gournay’s great intellect as a woman, and two address Advis and her spiritual union with Montaigne. Abbé Le Vayer,
wrote specifically on Gournay’s work, entitling his sonnet, “SUR MADEMOISELLE DE
GOURNAY, & sur son livre intitulé, les Advis, & c.”

In this sonnet, Gournay appears messianic, with a star presiding over her at birth. But this star exhausts itself in its efforts to show “en elle une illustre alliance / Des beautez de l’esprit & de celle du corps” (670). Present in these opening lines is the idea that mortal men could see neither Gournay’s intellectual depth nor her physical beauty which formed a great bond. It is unknown how this sonnet was received when it was written, but it would have been easy for detractors to mock the image of a star burning itself out trying to illuminate Gournay’s beauty. Le Vayer insists though with the bold metaphor that Heaven itself “luy departit ses plus riches tresors”. The notion of Gournay’s intellect as “charming” appears again for, in her, the union science and humility create “de si charmants accords”.

Le Vayer chastises those who spoke ill of Gournay’s writings:

Critique injurieux, vain pedant, monstre infame.
Toy qui crois pour estre homme, estre plus qu’une femme.
Abbaisse ton orgueil, escoute ses Advis.
   Ton Platon, ton Seneque, & ces autre Idoles
   Qu’avec tant de respect encensent tes escoles,
   Tireroient vanité de les avoir suivis.

Le Vayer reprimands men who think that, by virtue of their sex, they are above women and that they would, in turn, be losing their honor by reading words written by a woman. His qualifications of such men as “injurieux,” “pedant” and “monstre infame” are similar to Gournay’s own denunciations of her poor treatment. Le Vayer’s line, “Toy qui crois pour estre homme,” echos passages from Gournay’s Égalité where “la suprême
excellence à leur [men’s] advis, où les femmes puissent arriver, c’est de ressembler le commun des hommes” (1: 966). Le Vayer incorporates Plato and Seneca, two of Gournay’s own often cited “idols,” claiming that even they would gain from reading Gournay and following her “Advis”, a term employed in both the narrow sense of advice or opinion, as well as in the larger sense of Gournay’s work as a whole.

Ironically Gournay herself uses the word advis in the same semantic context, in Grief, when discussing the disentitlement of women’s speech.

. . . parmy ceux mesmes vivans et morts, qui ont acquis quelque nom aux Lettres en nostre Siecle, je dis, par fois soubs des robes serieuses; on en a cogneu qui mesprisoient absolument les Œuvres des femmes, sans se daigner amuser à les lire, pour sçavoir de quelle estoffe elle sont, ny recevoir advis ou conseil qu’ils y peussent rencontrer. . . . (1: 1077)

Le Vayer’s sonnet was plainly intended to pay homage to Gournay. The title itself names Gournay’s compilation, Advis, and the word is reemployed within the poem. He adeptly allies himself with Gournay, paralleling her social criticism in his text which, in turn, gives weight and justification to her arguments. Her hatred of calumny and distaste for pedants is echoed, along with a call for sexual equality. There is no underlying irony or calculated condescension in Le Vayer’s praise. Yet despite his honest endeavor, some commonplace insults ever so slightly come to the surface. There is a reminder of the many remarks about her unattractiveness, for the period, by the simple mention of an “illustrious alliance” between her physical and spiritual beauty. This comment runs in complete opposition to all previous discussions of Gournay’s appearance and would therefore seem incongruous to readers. Interjections, such as “Critique injurieux, vain pedant” are used to defend Gournay against her detractors. At the same time, it is
doubtful the reader felt any rap on the knuckles for the fun made of her. The force of Le Vayer’s criticism, in its gournayen style, reproduces the social energy that had been focused against her. So rather than redeeming Gournay, Le Vayer’s sonnet reconstructs the situations in which her looks and intellectual inferiority as a woman were evoked.

**Pallas, borne of Montaigne**

François La Mothe Le Vayer is the author of two sonnets: “Pour Mademoiselle de Gournay” and “Autre” which form a stylistic and thematic whole, both speaking of Gournay’s uniqueness of character and her bond with Montaigne. The first sonnet begins by saying that Gournay was victorious over her sex because her intellect equaled that of “des plus scavans” (671). Here again, Gournay is elevated to greatness because she achieved a level of intellectual competence that women did not normally attain. She was not victorious in or of herself, but because she rose to the level of men. Le Vayer then draws on her singularity: “Le siecle qui la veid avoit peine à le croire; / C’est un estonnement pour les aages suivans.” Gournay is notable for her distinctiveness from other women. It is in her peculiarity that she stands out. Le Vayer is expressing the same amazement with Gournay as Lipsius did in 1593. “…est-il possible que ces, je ne dirai pas lecture et esprit, mais sagesse et jugement, se retrouvent en ce sexe en ce siècle ici?”

Le Vayer also credits Montaigne for his alliance with Gournay: “Admirons maintenant le penetrant esprit / De ce pere que sage autresfois entreprit / De noüer avec

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191 Translation by Fogel (20).
elle une illustre alliance.” In these lines, it is Montaigne who, thanks to his penetrating mind, undertakes the covenant with Gournay. However, this is contrary to Gournay’s account of the origin of the alliance. In *Copie* it was she who first sought Montaigne out when in Paris in 1588. When she discovered that he too was there, she sent him a letter to “luy declarer l’estime qu’elle faisoit de sa personne et de son Livre” (2:1863). Instead of an active participant in the relationship, Gournay appears here as the passive instrument of Montaigne. There is no reciprocity between them, no mutual recognition of exceptional qualities and he makes no mention of Gournay’s youthful evaluation of Montaigne’s work.

This image of Gournay as a product of Montaigne is more apparent in the second sonnet by Le Vayer:

> C’est une autre Pallas qu’un pere extraordinaire  
> A produite icy bas de son docte cerveau.  
> C’est elle dont Montagne annoblit le berceau,  
> Qu’il adopta pour fille, & que par ce Mystere  
> Des graces de l’esprit il rendit heritiere  
> Pour laisser de soy meme un immortel tableau  
> Du depuis s’esloignant de la route commune  
> Elle ayma la vertu, mesprisa la fortune. . . . (671-72)

Le Vayer likens Gournay to Pallas, a common epithet for Athena, virgin goddess of arts, crafts and war, who leaped into the world in full armor when Zeus’s head was split open.192 The goddess is frequently represented in art as a “tall stately woman wearing a

192Pallas was the name of several Greek gods and goddesses. *Pallas* may be an early Greek word for virgin or maiden. One tale has Athena adopting the name of a childhood companion, Pallas, the daughter of Triton, after her death. During a friendly bout of fighting they lost their tempers and Athena killed her. In her grief, Athena took on the name of Pallas. See
crested helmet and often carrying spear and shield” (Tripp 117). Pallas, or Athena, is an androgynous character known to have borrowed her father’s thunderbolts in one of her many fits of temper. For Le Vayer, Gournay is the incarnation of this ancient goddess, created by the god-like father figure of Montaigne. She achieved her status as heiress to his legend, not due to her own efforts, but because Montaigne deigns to confer his authorization on her, through the regal gest of “ennobling” her cradle.

Gournay may never have adopted the name of “Pallas” for herself but she did value the title of Montaigne’s “covenant daughter.” Her relationship with Montaigne was of great importance to her initial career as it gave her a structure within which she could pursue her desire and the tools to discover herself and the world. It was also the key to a limited, yet, certain, access to literary circles. Gournay’s title was part of her idiosyncratic myth that functioned as a passport into the world of letters. As Sankovitch (78) convincingly argues, Montaigne was not Gournay’s “phallic master,” but it was he who was “the passive tool.” Following her profound, epiphanic experience of the Essais, Gournay took control of her relationship with Montaigne, writing him and then inviting him to visit her. She also took control of his literary heritage when she accepted to edit and publish his works.

It is my contention that once Gournay stepped into the world of letters, she would be presented and misrepresented as the *fille d’alliance* of Montaigne. Her self-fashioning came from her desire for empowerment, her struggle to liberate herself from what Sankovitch (7) terms the “anxiety of authorship.” For Gournay, her anxiety was largely focused on the constraints of a society which could not conceive of a woman actively pursuing a profession in the world of letters. However, her self-created myth would malfunction, reducing her to an imprecise and imperfect image of herself. The construct of Gournay, in its form and substance, was produced in the seventeenth century by a largely male imagination. She became a male myth out of the need to classify and explain a woman whose positions and actions rendered her a phenomenon in a patriarchal society where women were excluded from creating meaning for themselves. Tributes written to honor Gournay after her death are unmistakably flattering. As was customary in epitaphs of the time, the deceased was showered with glowing accolades. Images of her as a sibyl, or as Pallas surrounded by great temples, show a reverence and respect that were heartfelt. However, the good intentions of the authors do not prohibit an analysis of the embedded mental structures that are present in all of these texts. Clearly they have successfully absorbed the social values and contexts of the culture of early modern France, in what DeJean and Miller have termed, a *politics of poetics*.193 If Gournay is illustrious, in her own league, or without example, it is because women do not normally rise to her level of intellectual competence. But her writings do exist, in a physical

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manifestation of her literary ability. Since Gournay’s production cannot be denied, she becomes an anomaly, a “mystery of the graces” for her enthusiasts. Gournay’s early favorable reception would do as much to dismiss her as a writer and a philosopher as her caustic critics. She was constrained, denied literary autonomy, by the nature and limitations of her praise. Like her critics, her supporters provide no systematic examination of her works.

Gournay’s inclusion in literary debate is justified by the men who thought she was outstanding. Her persona becomes polarized, either belittled as a spinster with an unhealthy attachment to archaic language, or elevated to the provocative status of an oracle, both currents permeating her successive receptions. To reformulate this process within the concept of self-fashioning, the power generated to attack the alien, the Other, in the name of the authority, is produced in excess and threatens the authority its sets out to defend; hence self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self. This theory can be applied to Gournay: the power she generated was through her use of rhetoric, authoritative texts and authors, and her alliance with Montaigne, all of which she relied on heavily in her argumentation. The Other was the cultural construct of women as silent, docile creatures whose function was to serve, not to create. A victory over the Other would lead her to access the dominant culture, with the right to publish and publicly take stances in literary debates. Her passion for her causes and manipulation of her sources of power, though, created such violent reactions at times that she felt obliged to rework or completely remove certain texts, threatened as she was by Montaigne’s possible loss of prestige, or by her own personal
loss of patronage. Gournay’s most obvious excesses were the 1595 preface to the *Essais*, and her public defense of the Jesuites. In addition, her need to justify and defend her authorial prerogative, in conjunction with repetitive denunciations of calumny and her constant alignment with others, leaves the reader to wonder at times how to situate her, how to differentiate her from those she cites and from the models she parallels. Her self-fashioning was so successful that there was indeed some loss of self. Her contemporaries would lose no occasion to undermine the persona she crafted. The construct of Gournay evolved into what Justus Lipsius had presaged as a *novum monstrum* (2: 1932).
True and extensive Knowledge was, never can be, hurtful to the Peace of Society. It is Ignorance, or, which is worse than ignorance, false Knowledge, that is chiefly terrible to States. They are the furious, the ill taught, the blind and misguided, that are prone to be seized with groundless Fears, and unprovoked Resentment, to be roused by Incendiaries, and to rush desperately into Sedition and acts of Rage.

Such reads the second paragraph of the dedication by Des Maizeaux to the 1734 English edition of Bayle’s vast Dictionnaire historique et critique, first published in 1694. He praises Bayle as a friend and benefactor of mankind for his engagement to the teaching of truth and knowledge. Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) was an important skeptical thinker, forced into exile in Holland in 1681 where he would spend the rest of his life with other Huguenot refugees. He advocated total toleration of all religions, and atheism, based on the belief that it was impossible to determine the validity of one religion over another.

According to Richard Popkin, a Bayle scholar, and author of the introduction to The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle (1997), Bayle’s “complete tolerationist views went far beyond those offered on the subject by his contemporary,
The above words from Des Maizeaux on the dangers of the “ill taught” are quite similar to the advice Gournay gave to Marie de Medicis on the education of her children following the assassination of Henri IV. In *Adieu* she warned the Regent to be careful of flatterers and to detest those who tell false tales to the Prince “par envie ou malignité medisante sur leurs voisins” (1: 676). This theme runs through all of her treatises on education. According to Gournay, the regent’s role is to ensure that the prince learns to banish false knowledge and not to lend an ear to the “milion de corrupteurs de moeurs et d’abestisseurs d’esprit” (1: 589). The welfare of France depends on it. Both Bayle and Gournay challenged commonly held beliefs and emphasized the importance of *suffisance*, capacity, in the interpretation of the world.

Bayle’s capacity comes through skepticism, raising questions and challenging the adequacy of reason in order to point out the errors of different beliefs and claims. In “Marginal Writing,” Lionel Grossman puts forward the thesis that many of the shapers of modern Western culture have been marginal figures, Bayle being one of them. Grossman outlines Bayle’s conception of knowledge as a constant process of discovery which leads to the production of “notes and commentary, the insertion of ‘last-minute’ observations in the margins, and the addition of new material, including replies to critics, in successive editions” (382). This description sounds very much like Gournay’s own

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editorial process. Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique* began as a correction and supplement to other dictionaries, such as Moréri’s *Grand dictionnaire historique* (*Grand dictionnaire*) from 1674. The impact of the changes and supplementary information in *Dictionnaire historique* would be far reaching. It became “more popular among educated eighteenth-century laypeople than any other single work, and it served as a source of ideas and examples for all the philosophes” (Grossman 380).

The popularity of *Dictionnaire historique* arose, like that of the *Historiettes* addressed below, in part, due to its portrayals of immorality. Bayle goes outside of the realm of prominent figures of French society and includes figures from the Bible, Greek mythology and European royalty. The work was deemed scandalous and banned in France. Bayle devoted his life to scholarship and, like Gournay, never married for fear of interference from conjugal restrictions and duties. His support of total toleration of all religions would cause him to be repudiated by other French Calvinists in exile and attacked as an atheist in a pamphlet war. Popkin describes (x) how Bayle fought against both orthodox and liberal positions. “His many opponents from all sorts of perspectives insisted that he was actually trying to undermine all philosophy, science and religion”. Bayle claimed to be a true believer, a Protestant, explaining that he protested against everything. His most scandalous thesis was that atheists could have a more moral society than Christians. Writing from the physical and intellectual margins of early modern France, Bayle suffered his own isolation and persecution.

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Situating Gournay

Bayle’s entry on Gournay has received mixed receptions. Noiset (“Marie de Gournay et le caprice” 200) contends that despite giving abundant biographical details, Bayle does nothing to render justice to Gournay as an essayist. Dezon-Jones, though, takes a more conciliatory point of view. She (“Marie Le Jars de Gournay” 204) points out that Bayle was the first to devote a long article to Gournay and she suggests that he had a more favorable perception of her positions than many of her contemporaries. This disagreement between scholars reflects a much broader range of interpretations than exists about Bayle’s beliefs in general. Additionally, it is difficult to interpret what his message may be, if there is one, because of the complex layout of the text itself. His intent is not centrally illustrated but incidental, literally inscribed within the margins of the text.

His article on Gournay, in the 1697 edition, consists of an entry of nineteen lines, a rather short principal entry when compared with Moréri’s, for example which contains over seventy-five lines. However, Bayle’s main text is annotated with eleven footnotes: letters A-G, two asterisks and two other symbols. The notes take up over two hundred and twenty-five lines of smaller typeface text, divided into two columns below the entry. These footnotes are in turn supplemented with additional notes appearing in the left and right margins of the pages. These side notes provide quotations, bibliographic sources or

\[197\] In later editions the symbols are replaced with lower case letters. The symbols are represented here by a dagger and double dagger.
in some cases refer the reader to other footnotes, or give the Latin version of a saying Bayle uses in French.

Bayle begins his entry with what is typically stated of Gournay, that she was the “fille d’alliance de Michel de Montagne [A], & celebre par son savoir” (1274). He then refers the reader to Moréri for information on Gournay’s family and several other events of her life to which he ironically claims he does not have “beaucoup de choses à y ajouter” (1274). The scope and originality of Bayle lies in his differences with Moréri. The entry on Gournay in Moréri’s *Grand dictionnaire* can be roughly divided into six chronologically developed sections: her family and early discovery of the *Essais*, her editorial work, a transcription of Pasquier’s text quoted above in which Gournay appears, a mention of Gournay’s own publications, her erudition and correspondence with prominent people, and finally her death. The irony in Bayle is that he does indeed add to Moréri, not only in content but in tone. In the first footnote it is clear that Bayle holds a different perception of the nature of the relationship between Gournay and Montaigne than does Moréri. Whereas Moréri describes Gournay’s feelings towards Montaigne, as “pleins de gratitude & de soumission” (206), Bayle describes them as the same feelings of “respect & de zèle” (1274) that she had for her “veritable” father. What emanates from Moréri is a more subordinate nature in the relationship than in Bayle. *Soumission* expresses a passive state of physical and intellectual dependency to another power or authority. Furetière’s dictionary refers to “Humiliation, obeïsance…La femme doit avoir

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198 The entire entry on Gournay is on this one page.
de la sousmission à l’égard de son mari. Les flatteurs font mille reverences et sousmissions.” Submission is not something revered, or a state to which one aspires. It is a position of inferiority, *beneath, under* those with power. It is the place of women and flatterers which can be maintained by force. *Le Robert* gives the antonyms “Commandement; autonomie. Émancipation. . . .”

*Respect* and *zeal*, on the other hand, are not rooted in a condition of reliance, or forced deference, but are derived from one’s active judgments about someone or something. In addition to defining “respect” as “Deference, honneur,” Furetiere gives the synonyms of “Consideration, égard”. For “zèle” he adds an interesting comment to its definition as “Ardeur, passion,” noting that “les Poètes se servent quelquefois de zele pour signifier l’amour…En ce sens il vieillit.” Gournay’s feelings, as Bayle qualifies them, can therefore be interpreted as an enthusiastic interest in Montaigne. However, as his entry on Gournay reveals, he also knew of Gournay’s reputation as a staunch defender of the poetic language of the Renaissance, and he did not choose the word “zele” innocently, without knowledge of the older, poetic usage of the word. Gournay’s *zeal* for Montaigne, perhaps, moves from a state of admiration into one of love. For proof of what he is saying, Bayle adds that “vous en tomberez d’accord, si vous considérez bien tout ce qu’elle dit dans la preface des *Essais*” (1274). Inherent in this statement is the notion that one cannot make a just opinion from a position of ignorance. Not only does one need to read Gournay, but to read and *consider well* what she said.

Moréri and Bayle both continue with the question of Gournay’s editorial work. Moréri states that Gournay “corrigea & fit réimprimer” the *Essais*, based on Montaigne’s
notes. Her contribution seems minimal in the terms Moréri’s chooses. Bayle, on the contrary, returns to the preface, not only to say it deserves to be read, but that it “peut surtout être agréable à ceux qui aiment l’histoire des livres et des editions” (1274 my emphasis). For him, Gournay’s preface is one of merit, even enjoyable, on the condition that one loves the history of books. This condition of loving history underscores the importance Bayle places on critical analysis, unmasking falsehoods and the process of discovery. To take pleasure in Gournay’s writing, to be able to see its value, one must question traditionally accepted interpretations. One must, in fact, love history, and not put faith in unsubstantiated observations. As Grossman explains (382), Bayle’s mode of reasoning is “a constant unraveling…As it is a ‘silly vanity’ of humankind to imagine…that a statement is true simply because it has been accepted by tradition or carries some other mark of authority.” To Moréri’s estimation of Gournay’s “jugement avantageux” of the Essais, Bayle quotes Montaigne’s reflections on Gournay. Nobody would be more capable of judging Gournay on Montaigne than Montaigne himself. Bayle provides the volume, chapter, page and location on the page where Montaigne speaks of her, giving an almost scientific air to his work. He then includes, as Moréri does, the entire passage from Pasquier. Based on this one footnote, it is clear that Bayle had much to add to Moréri.

**Du Perron’s “sanglant outrage”**

Moréri does not speak of Gournay’s “Defense des Jesuites” or of the Anti-Coton affair that ensued. For Bayle, however, this event was of prime importance, shaping how
society viewed her from that point in her life on. His description of this period in Gournay’s life accounts for the majority of his main entry and of the footnotes.

On trouve dans le (B) *Perroniana* un trait for desobligeant contre cette Demoiselle: c’est au sujet (C) d’une Satyre où on la mêla, & qui fut une des suites de l’Anti-Coton. Il y eut aussi un libelle qui eut pour titre* l’Anti-Gournai. La raillerie piquante du Cardinal du Perron n’empêchoit pas qu’il n’eût de l’estime pour cette savant Demoiselle…Elle eût bien fait de ne pas écrire contre les partisans de l’Anticoton. Une personne de son sexe doit éviter soigneusement cette sorte de querelles. Les Ecrivains satiriques sont des rustres qui‡ ne gardent point de mesures: ils attaquent les femmes par l’endroit le plus sensible. Celle-ci fut représentée non seulement (F) plus vieille qu’elle n’était, mais aussi† comme une fille de mauvaise vie. (1274-75)

In note (B) Bayle includes the entire passage from the *Perroniana*, informing the reader that he is quoting it “tout du long” rather than singling out comments for critique. Du Perron’s narrative elicits the longest commentary in Bayle’s entry. He responds in an original manner to Du Perron’s tale. He was the first writer to challenge the text by refocusing the reader onto its impact on Gournay’s feelings. “Je suis sûr que la Demoiselle de Gournai auroit pris pour une mortelle offense cette raillerie…Il n’y a nulle aparence qu’elle ait été jamais assez humble, pour renoncer à l’estime de ses agréments corporels autant que la raison le demandait’ (1274). Despite the perfections of Gournay’s mind that were a source of consolation and glory, Bayle says, Du Perron’s attack of her looks was devastating. Gournay did indeed care about what others thought of her. Unlike Moréri’s comment about Gournay’s feelings of submission, Bayle speaks of her pride. He advances that she was never “humble” enough to renounce the esteem of others, even though reason should have told her otherwise. Reason, then, cannot solve all questions and problems.
According to Bayle, Du Perron pushed his insults beyond all limits of acceptability by saying that Gournay should put a drawing of herself in her book. “Je doute que la vertu des plus grandes Saintes fût à l’épreuve d’un aussi sanglant outrage que le seroit celui-ci” (1274). Bayle again tries to uncover something of the psychological impact of the personal affronts Gournay endured. He conjectures that she would have preferred to know nothing and have little common sense than to pass as a person so void of charm that she was forced to remain a virgin for lack of suitors. Bayle himself makes no remarks on Gournay’s attractiveness. This is not the approach of his *Dictionnaire*. “The reason that operates in it is critical. It destroys error; it does not generate ‘truth’” (Grossman 383).

**Insulting “notre pucelle”**

The information contained in note C was of obvious importance for Bayle. Two notes in the main entry, *, †, and footnote F all refer the reader to note C. In addition, the note contains seven footnotes of its own. Much of the content of the note consists of Bayle’s attempts to resolve the confusion over the different titles of the works involved in the anti-Coton affair. Remerciment had circulated in manuscript form with other titles before its publication as “Remerciment des beurieres de Paris au Sieur de Courbouzon Montgomery.” Bayle criticizes Adrien Baillet’s *Satyres personnelles* for ignoring this fact, and for not citing other titles and their respective authors. Bayle mentions that Gournay wrote in favor of the Jesuits, something, he says, that she should have avoided because satirists will do everything to inflame that they can, to include questioning a
woman’s virtue. As he states, Gournay “publia quelques livres pour les Jesuïtes, & contre l’Anti-Coton” (1275) for which “notre pucelle” was insulted. Oddly, in this case, Bayle is the one who does not cite Gournay’s tract, either in full or in abbreviated form. For someone as conscientious as he everywhere else in his writing, this was not an oversight or a moment of inattention. Bayle did not forget the title of Gournay’s essay, *Adieu, de l’Ame du Roy de France et de Navarre Henry le Grand à la royne. Avec, la défense des Pere Jesuites*. Instead, he adeptly steers clear of this explosive title to fix the reader on the figure of Jeanne d’Arc, commonly referred to as “pucelle” Bayle’s allusion serves to fashion Gournay as this famous figure. Gournay herself wrote twelve poems in honor of Jeanne d’Arc, ten for a collection of poetry, *Bouquet de Pinde*, (1626) to which two more were added in 1641. As Arnould explains Gournay’s fascination, “Cette dévotion à Jeanne d’Arc n’est pas de pure circonstance mais procède aussi de motifs personnels” (2: 1833 Note A).

Jeanne d’Arc also appears in Gournay’s “De la neantise de la commune vaillance de ce temps et du peu de prix de la qualité de Noblesse” (1626), an essay that attacks the morality and manners of the nobility who mistake their vices for virtues, and who have no concept of the true meaning of “vaillance.” Courtesy, generosity and discretion do not come with titles, Gournay insists. To support her argument, she gives the example of Socrates (1: 913) who was the son of sculptor and a midwife. After which she emphatically introduces her cult heroine.

Mais quoy! Ma plume Françoise et feminine de plus, pourroit-elle exalter quelque merite populaire, oubliant la Pucelle d’Orleans? Dieu te garde Auguste Bergere: Auguste et plus que Royale te puis-je appeller, puis que
tu refis ton Roy deffait, et deffis son ennemy...Charlemagne et Martel furent de grands Monarques et grands Conquerans: mais ton trophée, ô Pucelle Jeanne, surpasse le leur de pareille mesure, que c’est chose plus illustre et plus haute de delivrer son Pays que de l’accroistre, et d’amplifier l’estendue de ses faicts heroïques, que ses bornes. (1: 914)

Gournay continues with further explanations and examples to illustrate how the qualities of true nobility can be acquired. The message inferred is that the virtue of one’s birth position does not determine one’s virtue. To push the reasoning of this theme further, although Gournay does not do so overtly, as it is altogether possible that commoners can equal, or even surpass, nobles in quality, women, must surely be able to do the same, as Jeanne d’Arc, notre pucelle, justly illustrated. Hillman remarks that Gournay was fascinated with portrayals of female strength:

The writer’s ultimate figurations of female triumph then, are women who excelled in the ultimate masculine sphere, epitomizing the fulfillment of her aspiration to beat men at their own game. For while she liked to envisage herself...as a collaborator in a noble human enterprise, she was also, at a practical level, a fierce and irascible competitor. (12)

But it is Bayle’s use of the first person plural possessive “notre” that elevates Gournay from a simple maiden to a national heroine, the one upon which she fashioned herself. In doing so, Bayle was able to subtly apply one of Gournay’s models, to his own fashioning.

Note D contains the explanation to the comment that, notwithstanding Du Perron’s mockery, the abbot had much esteem for Gournay. To prove his point, Bayle cites Marolles’s Mémoires, justifying the length of his quotation with a statement where he qualifies his public. “Ceux qui trouveront qu’il n’auroit fallu qu’en copier une partie, seront des gens qui ne se soucient pas de connoître beaucoup de particularitez de la vie des hommes illustres. Ce n’est pas pour ceux qui ont ce goût-là que je travaille, j’en fais
ma declaration” (1275). Unmistakably the skeptical arguments are meant to be applied to previous treatments of Gournay. It is the method used from “‘Aaron’ to ‘Zuylichem’ . . . showing the inadequacy of human reason in its efforts to deal with questions concerning the nature of man, of reality, of religion, of history” (Popkin viii). Bayle is not writing for those looking to confirm their beliefs, but for those interested in questioning and debating the merits of all orthodoxies. The main entry states that Gournay was “fort bien reçuē (E) chez les Princesses” (1275). Note E again relies on Marolle’s Mémoires as proof (1: 58).

Conspiracy of critics

As with the Defence des beurrières, other stories involving Gournay circulated under different titles before taking their definitive forms in Historiettes. As Bayle states, “on a vu paroître depuis peu deux contes qui ne (G) se ressemblent guere, touchant Mr. de Racan & Mademoiselle de Gournai” (1275-76). Note G tells both stories, one known as the “Soupe à la greque,” the other, “Les Trois Racans.” The problem was not necessarily that several stories had been circulating about Gournay, but that the nature of her relationship with Racan was portrayed differently in the two stories. It is this incoherency which posed a problem for the historian. The first story presents them as having a friendly rapport:

Le premier nous représente M. de Racan et mademoiselle de Gournai comme deux personnes qui se voyaient très-souvent, & qui se parloient à coeur ouvert...C’est entre Auteurs qui sont amis le comble de la familiarité. Mais au contraire le second recit est tout-à-fait propre à persuader que ces deux personnes furent mal ensemble. (1275-76).
In “Soupe à la greque,” when Gournay asks Racan what he thinks of some epigrams she had written, he replies that they are not any good; they lack wit. Gournay, unperturbed, tells him not to pay any mind to them as “c’étoient des Epigrammes à la Greque” (1276). Later that night at dinner, when Gournay comments that the soup is bad, Racan replies, “Mademoiselle, c’est une soupe à la Greque” (1276). This story highlights the familiarity between the two authors and Bayle implies it is a more accurate reflection of the rapport that existed between Gournay and Racan.

Bayle had reservations about the accuracy of the second story, “Les Trois Racans.” It ends with Gournay chasing Racan out of her house, hitting him with her slipper. This prank may well have been the actual first meeting between Gournay and Racan, after which their friendship ensued. “Soupe à la greque” is told in Ménage’s *Menagiana*, and “Les Trois Racans” in *Recueil des bons contes et des bons mots* by M. de Callières before appearing in *Historiettes*. Both were published in Amsterdam in 1693 by Braekman, only a year prior to *Dictionnaire historique*. As Bayle lived in Holland and was familiar with the literary scene, he may have thought the two events were supposed to have taken place around the same time. He gave little credence to “Les Trois Racans” which he deemed a fabrication by Boisrobert. “Je croirois sans peine que c’est une fable; & je juge principalement cela à l’égard des coups de pantoufle. Apparemment ce fut ou une invention toute pure, ou une broderie de Boisrobert, pour

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plaisanter tout à la fois & de Racan, & de la savante” (1276). The idea of Gournay attacking someone with her slipper was too far fetched for a skeptic to believe, and Bayle expressed concern over the possible fallout from Trois Racans. He fears it will hide the cordial relationship Gournay and Racan shared as fellow writers.

Bayle’s concern proved justified much later, in 1910, when Mario Schiff published Marie de Gournay: la fille d’alliance de Montaigne, the first twentieth-century biography of Gournay followed by two of her texts, L’Égalité and Grief. Dezon-Jones (“Marie Le Jars de Gournay 205) insists on the importance of Schiff’s work from a historical point of view because, before 1910, no other text from Gournay had been reprinted apart from “Des Diminutifs français.”201 Schiff’s work therefore was examined by twentieth-century researchers, at a minimum for Gournay’s texts, as no complete edition of her works was available until 2002. What he says about Gournay and the references he includes contribute to the perpetuation of her persona as consecrated by Tallemant. For Schiff, Gournay was an easy target, and as he states, “les passionnés et les sincères ont toujours été une proie facile pour les moqueurs” (37). Yet he then delights in retelling the Trois Racans, and others stories himself:

Sorel se sert pour son “Histoire comique de Francion” de farces qu’on a jouées à la pauvre vieille, et l’incomparable Tallemant raconte comment les “pestes” s’y prenaient pour la faire enrager. L’histoire des trois Racans est devenue classique. Il est tout à fait impossible de parler de Mademoiselle de Gournay, sans donner la parole au savoureux auteur des “Historiettes”. (39-40)

201 The essay appeared in Kristoffer Nyrop Grammaire historique de la langue française, 6 vols. (Copenhague: Bojesen, 1899).
No doubt audiences would find more humor in this farce of mistaken identity than in the more anachronistic exchange of wit on bad poetry and soup, à la grecque. The mystification which victimized Gournay would therefore receive more mention than the dialectic she develops in her treatises, and this, until the late twentieth century, despite Bayle’s efforts to deconstruct her negative reception.

The first edition of his *Dictionnaire historique* was later revised to include a lengthy discussion of Gournay’s linguistic quarrels. The fifth edition (1740) includes comments in the main entry that Gournay “se fâcha beaucoup de ce changement de langage (H)” (185). Bayle cites passages from Sorel’s *Connaissance des bons livres* and Ménage’s *Requête* as examples. He gives different angles of the debate, building up the arguments against Gournay’s positions. “Plusieurs dirent sans doute que la demoiselle de Gournai…ne condamnait la réforme du langage que parce que c’était la production des jeunes auteurs . . . On lui appliqua sans doute ce qu’Horace dit si bien de certains gens, qui s’imaginent que leur goût est la seule règle du bon . . . ” (189-90). By introducing the arguments against Gournay with “sans doute” (twice) “plusieurs dirent que” and “on lui appliqua,” Bayle places himself outside of the beliefs he is dismissively explaining, without his usual references and citations. What follows this section of sixteen lines is a passage of eighty lines where the reader discovers that Bayle is indeed not part of the *plusieurs* or the *on*. “Mais tout bien considéré, cette demoiselle n’avait pas autant de tort que l’on s’imagine, et il serait à souhaiter que les auteurs les plus illustres

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de ce temps-là se fussent vigoureusement opposés à la proscription de plusieurs mots qui n’ont rien de rude, et qui serviraient à varier l’expression . . . ” (190). The argumentation continues with an elaboration of the damage that the “fausse délicatesse de quelques esprit” and the “caprice de l’usage” has done to French. These terms echo those of Gournay, especially when he claims that expressions that are now deemed “de la vieille cour” were good enough for Henri IV and Louis-le-Juste. Bayle does not point out specific individuals to blame, as Gournay did with Malherbe and his “bande” but instead points to a more general conspiracy. “Il s’y fourre je ne sais quel complot, et cette machination ne vient pas tant des lecteurs qui sont auteurs que de ceux qui ne le sont pas. Ceux-ci se donnent tout le plaisir de critiquer sans sentir la peine de composer” (190).

The fault of the impoverishment of French lies with critics who have none of the sensitivity of writers.\footnote{Bayle tolerates two exceptions to his critique. The young writer and one who writes very little are exempt from feeling an author’s pain.}

It is my contention that, everything considered, Bayle was not as derogatory or reductive as some twentieth-century critics argue. In her article on Gournay’s reception, “Marie de Gournay et le caprice des siècles,” Noiset rejects Bayle’s entire article, lumping it together with Moréri’s: “Les éditions successives du \textit{Grand Dictionnaire} de Moréri et du \textit{Dictionnaire} de Bayle ne rendent pas mieux justice à l’essayiste . . . elles ne font en général pas mention de l’oeuvre de Gournay, sauf pour rappeler qu’elle édita les \textit{Essais} de Montaigne après la mort du grand humaniste” (200). Noiset’s critique misses perhaps the originality of Bayle and the more general objectives of his \textit{Dictionnaire}. In
avoiding the hyperboles and generalizations of other critics and defenders alike, he resituates Gournay within the texts and contexts of the time. The “marginal” comments reveal, through their textual disposition and frequent cross references, that convictions are too often based solely on what is most apparent. The information that is most central, to either validate or to refute beliefs, principles and opinions, needs to be uncovered by a multiplicity of views. One must critique what is said, written or otherwise thought to be known, investigating the subject at hand from different angles and validating sources.

**DISTILLING GOURNAY: TALLEMANT DES RÉAUX’S *HISTORIETTES***

Antoine Adam describes (xvi) the original reception of Tallemant des Réaux’s *Historiettes* in his 1960 edition, the first to publish the full text which, until that date, had been subject to censure. After the seventeenth century, Tallemant’s anecdotal portraits remained virtually unknown as they sat in the family’s library until his heirs auctioned off the manuscript and it began to circulate again around 1820. The author had been forgotten to the point that when the name of Tallemant was mentioned, Gédéon was mistaken for his brother François, or his cousin Paul, both priests. The manuscript was so unknown, Adam explains, that when it was auctioned, “nul ne put dire à qui il convenait de l’attribuer, et ce témoignage inestimable sur le Grand Siècle fut adjugé pour la somme de vingt francs” (xvi). Tallemant’s stories were published in 1834 and the text provoked an immediate scandal. The seventeenth century appeared under a very different light than what the public had grown accustomed to reading. Tallemant was accused of besmirching venerable people with a licentious and perverse imagination, and of elaborating on the
sordid side of society. Adam insists that, on the contrary, the stories provide “un témoignage d’une extraordinaire vérité, aussi bien dans le détail que par l’image d’ensemble qu’elles [the stories] en donnent” (XXII). The factual information concerning Gournay is a subject of debate; some is blatantly false while other information is so tainted by Tallemant’s scornful tone that it would be impossible to formulate a positive appreciation of Gournay from his work alone. Although this aspect of Tallemant’s writing is fairly uniform for all his stories, future generations of scholars have relied on the historical aspects of his portraits, along with the titillating tidbits present throughout, to gain another point of view of the seventeenth century than those found in traditional academic accounts of the period.

The relative importance of Tallemant’s participation in shaping Gournay’s persona lies in the long-lasting success of his *Historiettes*. The bibliographical note in the 1960 edition lists seven publication dates between 1834 and 1934: second editions appeared in 1840, 1861 and once more with no date; third editions were published from 1854 to 1860 and again in 1862 and a fourth edition from 1932 to 1934 (XVII-XXIX). Finally the complete texts were available in the 1960 edition. *Historiettes* did not contribute to Gournay’s reception during her lifetime as they were not published or widely known until about seventy-five years after her death. It is, however, Tallemant de Réaux’s anecdotes and personal judgments that provide the foundation of the Gournay persona as it develops after the 1830’s. In recording traits of many prominent people of the time, collected from mémoires and other documents, and interjecting with his own irreverent assessments and second-hand hearsay, Tallemant’s work provides a broad-
range counter appreciation of seventeenth-century culture that can be palliated, in most cases, by other sources. Gournay is not an exception as she, too, benefited from many positive appreciations along her “chain of reception” (Jauss 45). The pointed attacks on her person, though, muffled the praise bestowed on her work, and Historiettes played a most decisive role in future receptions despite Tallemant’s reputation as a scandal seeker.

**The making of an originale**

Tallemant was the first to use the substantive “original” in its negative sense in 1657, perhaps its earliest usage in print as McGinnis notes in his work on originality in Letters in eighteenth century France (139 Note 4). “Joyeuse estoit un original. Il avoit je ne scay quelle fille avec laquelle il couchoit, mais il juroit qu’il ne luy faisoit rien, et qu’en cela il n’offensoit point Dieu” (2: 368). Although Tallemant was not referring to Gournay here, she clearly came to embody this same notion of an “originale,” as evidenced later by her inclusion in Paul de Musset’s 1863 *Extravagants et originaux du XVIIe siècle*. In this book, Gournay is one of seven figures Musset considers as outside of seventeenth century norms.²⁰⁴ According to him, Gournay was, in her style and her way of living, a person of the sixteenth century, “gothique” as he explains (177). “Elle devint en peu d’années une figure tout à fait bizarre. On se moqua d’elle. On lui joua quantité de méchants tours; mais on craignait l’explosion et la rudesse gauloise de sa colère” (159). Musset also incorporates Tallemant’s text into his own, elaborating and expanding it.

²⁰⁴ Also included are Madame de Guette, le chevalier Plénoches, M. de Guise, Bensérade, Boutteville and Deschapelles.
Tallemant served as an ideal source for other writers because he was able to distill the various stories and criticisms of Gournay circulating in his time into a concise, delightfully abject chronicle that materializes from his voyeuristic and superficial perusal of her life and works. Tallemant’s gaze on Gournay is accompanied by an overtly misogynistic and patronizing tone that will carry over until the late twentieth century, for it becomes very difficult to disentangle Gournay, the person, from the literary product of her persona.

The identity Tallemant aids in constructing is in marked contrast from the one presented in Gournay’s autobiographical texts. The opening sentence is rife with complacency. “Mademoiselle de Gournay estoit une vieille fille de Picardie, et bien demoiselle, Je ne sçay où elle avait esté chercher Montaigne, mais elle se vantoit d’estre sa fille d’alliance” (379). As we can tell, the divergence with Copie is striking. “La Damoiselle de Gournay Marie de Jars, nasquit à Paris… “ (2:1861). Since Gournay was in fact born in Paris and only spent a few years in Gournay-sur-Aronde, Tallemant wants to create the image of a provincial, thus simple and unfashionable, woman trying to get her foot in the door of the literary life in the capital. Whereas Gournay speaks of her birth and her parents, Tallemant presents her as an old spinster as if she had come into the world in this way. Gournay did seek out Montaigne, sending him a letter praising his Essais when she learned he was in Paris. This was certainly a very bold gesture and therefore compelling, or curious, at the least, for a young woman of her time. It also hints at a life that will be replete with bold stances. It was Montaigne, however, who personally went to thank her and was then so impressed with her analytical insight that he proposed
the title of “adopted daughter” when he learned of her father’s death. And it was Montaigne who subsequently would travel to Gournay-sur-Aronde to work on a new edition of *Essais*. Tallemant demeans the relationship in saying that “he does not know how” their meeting came about, as if it were inconceivable. It was certainly an angle of approach when she sought to have *Promenoir* published.

When Tallemant’s biographical sketch continues with, “elle sçavoit, et elle faisoit des vers, mais meschans” (379), he perfunctorily dismisses her knowledge and poetry as soon as he brings them up, providing no examples or further justifications for his opinion. As a master at the expository technique of the double-edged commentary, Tallemant places an opinion, largely positive in nature, only to immediately follow it with denigration. It is patent in a concluding paragraph when he describes her bequeathals. “En mourant, elle laissa par testament son Ronsard à l’Estoile, comme si elle l’eust jugé seul digne de le lire, et à Gombaud une carte de la vieille Grece, de Sophian, qui vaut bien cinq solz” (380). The implications are that Gournay is haughty, for only the poet and Academician Claude de l’Estoile (1602-1652) was worthy of her Ronsard. In fact we know that Gournay considered l’Estoile a friend. In her 1644 testament she refers to his love of “la vraye et genereuse poesie” and she states that it was he who “a tesmoigné desirer d’elle quelque chose de tel par un effect de bonne volonté vers elle” (2: 1958). Her stated reason of the gift could be a case of Gournay positioning herself for posterity if l’Estoile did not in fact make a request. Either way, Tallemant’s comment – “comme si elle l’eust jugé seul digne…” – has Gournay looking very self-important.
Tallemant’s comment about the map of Greece implies that she is either cheap, poor or both. In reality, the map Gournay was an edition of one of the first separate maps of Greece ever published, *Hellados perigraphe* (Description of Greece), drawn by Nikolaos Sophianos. Ed Redmond, Geography & Map Reference Specialist at the Library of Congress, explained that Nikolaos Sophianos is credited with only one work, a c. 1544 map of Greece, published in Rome and now lost. There are no known copies but there were many later versions and editions published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The map Gournay conveyed in 1645 was probably one of these versions, based on the Sophianos work. Gournay did not will a map to Gombaud, as Tallemant suggests, but three maps to a friend of Tallemant’s, Jacques Le Pailleur whom she speaks about in the explanatory letter to Thevenin which precedes *Copie*. Her testament is quite clear: “Elle donne audict sieur Le Pailleur . . . trois cartes qui sont en sa chambre, deux rares de l’ancienne Rome, et de l’ancienne Grece, et la troisieme est celle du monde” (2: 1958). Tallemant’s error is quite odd considering that Le Pailleur, the “grand rieur” was one of his principal informants, according to Arnould (2: 1861 Note B). Le Pailleur was obviously someone in whom Gournay had great faith and trust because it was to him that she gave *Copie* for safe-keeping after her death, along with some other papers “d’autant

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205 I wish to thank Mr. Redmond for his time and the information he kindly provided me on Sophianos.

206 The cartographic collections of the Library of Congress include a copy of the 1545 Gerbel edition and another copy sold at auction in 2005 for $197,638.00. No additional information on the valuation of this specific map in 1645, when Gournay bequeathed it, could be located. More information on Sophianos and a list of editions of the his map with descriptions may be found in Robert W. Karrow’s *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century and Their Maps: Bio-Bibliographies of the Cartographers of Abraham Ortelius*, 1570. Chicago: Speculum Orbis, 1993, (495-499).
que je desire qu’ils me survivent” (2: 1861). She also left him three old notebooks from her youth that “il bruslera soudain s’il luy plaist” (2: 1958) and a 1635 copy of Essais in which she had made her latest corrections. Tallemant demeans their relationship by putting a monetary price of five cents on something which had immeasurable value to Gournay, whatever the market value of the map may have been at the time.

Another technique at belittling her is to point out that Malherbe had made fun of her. Her essay on diminutives is yet another target. Although hundreds of examples were available to him from Gournay’s essay, he cites, in error, the examples, “chauderon, chauderonnet, chauderonnelet” (379) which are not in her treatise. It is conceivable that Tallemant did not make a “mistake,” but that he searched specifically for a diminutive that Gournay had not cited, in order to chide her on being incomplete. In reality, she had previously been rebuked for not providing enough examples of diminutives which provoked her into lengthening the original essay. Tallemant’s comment is a reminder of this incident and at the same time he finds yet another angle to dismiss the content of her writing. Worse yet, an anecdote about Gournay not being able to explain the meaning of the title of Ombre to Boisrobert makes her out to appear rather unsound of mind. “Boisrobert luy demanda un jour la raison du titre de ce livre; elle ne la luy sceût dire. ‘Il faut chercher,’ respondit-elle, ‘dans mon cabinet d’Allemagne.’ Mais après avoir bien fouillé dans tous les tiroirs, elle ne la trouva point” (379). There are two ways to analyze this anecdote. The first is that Tallemant is writing purely in bad faith, knowing that Gournay had included the saying, L’homme est l’ombre d’un songe, et son oeuvre est son ombre, on the cover page of the 1626 edition, as well as an explanation in her preface
which he chose to ignore for the sake of comedy. The 1626 edition comments on the title *Ombre* in its opening letter “Au lecteur”.

> A quel plus bas prix, après tout, pouvoirs-je mettre ce Livre par ma propre sentence, que de le qualifier, Ombre; n’estant moy-mesme sa mere, que l’ombre d’un songe, par cette autre sentence antique et Divine? J’ay donc raison de le nommer Ombre par sa neantise: sans adjouster qu’il est d’ailleurs encore mon ombre et mon image, d’autant qu’il exprime la figure de mon esprit, maistresse piece de mon estre. (1: 570 Note 4)

The second analysis is that Tallemant had only seen a later edition, *Advis*, which did not include the epigraph, and that he did not seek out what Gournay had meant by “*Ombre*” because it simply was not important to him. In either case, there is a lack of respect for the work and the author.

Other anecdotes mentioned by Tallemant include the obscene poem that Moret, Bueil and Yvrande sent Gournay, and the mystification that was at the origin of *Copie*. Even though Tallemant refers to the three pranksters as “ces pestes,” it is Gournay who appears the fool. “Elle fut six semaines à faire sa Vie. Après, elle fit barbouiller, et envoya tout cela en Angleterre, où l’on ne sçavoit ce que cela vouloit dire” (379). In an exchange between Gournay and Jamyn, her friend and servant, Tallemant depicts Gournay in the same light as Petit does in “Le Poet Burlesque,” comically deliberating on the value of different words. “‘Jamyn,’ dit-elle en ronflant selon sa coutume; ‘Merdieu, ce mot-là n’est pas en usage: je le passerois pourtant; il est vray qu’il est un peu vilain’” (379). Contrary to what Tallemant is implying – for the sake of mocking Gournay – the practice of reading verse to servants was not unheard of at the time. Pellison’s *Histoire*
De L’académie française (1652), for instance, relates how academician Claude de l’Estoile recited his work to his servants.

. . . lorsqu’il avoit composé un ouvrage, il le lisoit à sa servante (comme on a dit aussi de Malherbe) pour connaître s’il avait bien réussi, croyant que les vers n’avaient pas leur entière perfection s’il n’étaient remplis d’une certaine beauté qui se fait sentir aux personnes même les plus rudes et les plus grossières. (246-7)

In many ways, this anecdote parallels Malherbe’s assertion that his language models were the longshoremen at Port-au-Foin, and that prescriptive rules for French should follow uncultured usage. Gournay’s interest in language, on the other hand, is degraded to foolishness as she and Jamyn “snort out” words in order to better estimate how they sound.

Tallemant is not indifferent to Gournay’s skill at repartee. The tale he tells about her first meeting with Richelieu does not have the usual double-edged remarks as found in other anecdotes, and one interesting piece of information in this story concerns her servant Jamyn. Boisrobert refers to her as the natural child of Amadis Jamyn when he introduces Gournay to Richelieu:


In Tallemant’s story on Racan (383), Gournay is made to speak in a similar fashion when addressing to Yvrande. “‘Voylà qui est gentil, Jamyn,’ disoit-elle; ‘Jamyn en peut estre, Monsieur, elle est fille naturelle d’Amadis Jamyn, page de Ronsard. . . .’” This detail is
problematic and merits an aside from the *Historiette* at hand, as it sheds light onto Gournay’s self-fashioning.

These lines that Boisrobert and Gournay are made to utter could simply be the literary creation of Tallemant, for the purpose of his narratives. Or perhaps Boisrobert made up these stories for the pleasure of Richelieu. Boisrobert was known for embellishing amusing anecdotes for the sole purpose of making Richelieu laugh. Magne (4) describes Boisrobert’s unique position in Richelieu’s service.

…Un emploi singulier de confident, d’amii, de secrétaire pour la littérature, d’amuseur et de nouvelliste. Il excellait si bien, par ses gazettes bouffonnes, ses reparties, ses bons mots, recueillis aux quatre coins de la ville…que M. Cytois, premier médecin, ordonnait souvent à Son Eminence ‘deux drachmes de Boisrobert.’

Yet another possibility, more likely, is that it was Gournay herself who cultivated this false filiation in order to give a gentle reminder, not only of her great admiration for the poet, but of an almost intimate, familial connection.

**False filiations and controlling identities**

In the article, “Nicole Jamyn, la suivante de Mademoiselle de Gournay, est-elle fille d'Amadys Jamyn?” Maurice Cauchie argues the case for a literary fabrication on the part of Gournay.²⁰⁷ He contends (25) that Gournay must have found it “très honorable” to pass her servant off as the daughter of a famous poet. Amadis Jamyn, (?1538-1592) poet, translator and philosopher, was known for his lifelong friendship with Ronsard whom he

had served as page and secretary during his youth. Jamyn was admired by his contemporaries, becoming a secretary and court poet to both Charles IX and then Henri III. Although his reputation was eclipsed by that of Desportes, Carrington maintains that Jamyn’s influence on poetic theory was just as great during his generation but that it was Malherbe’s commentary of Desportes that made him more famous.\textsuperscript{208} Jamyn’s service to Ronsard lasted roughly fifteen years during which time Jamyn appears in several of his mentor’s poems, such as “La Salade,” (1569) where he is portrayed as a friend and intellectual companion. Ronsard also figures in Jamyn’s own work. Ronsard’s respect for Jamyn is later underscored when he asks him to participate in a collection of verse, \textit{Mascarades} (1571).\textsuperscript{209} Their complicity is shown in Jamyn’s \textit{Sonnet à Monseigneur de Ronsard}, “Fait nouveau messager” (66) where the reader learns that Ronsard has been suffering from a prolonged bout with quartan fever.

Cauchie’s case for Gournay’s ruse is substantiated by his research into Jamyn’s civil status which shows that she was in reality, “fille de deffunct François Jamyn, vivant marchant, demeurant à Barbonne en Champagne, et Claude le Grand, jadis sa femme” (24) as her marriage contract states. One month after Gournay’s death on July 13, 1645, Jamyn signed a marriage contract with Salvat de Salvetat, “Toulousain âgé de 71 ans . . . secrétaire de la chambre du roi, demeurant rue saint Jacques à Paris, et fils d’un docteur


\textsuperscript{209} Jamyn contributed two sonnets, “Comme la mascarade” and “Chacun connoist ta grandeur,” dedicated to Villeroy. These two pieces are the only liminary verses present in the collection, and as Samuel Carrington noted in his 1973 edition of Jamyn’s \textit{Œuvres complètes}, Ronsard’s request was indeed a “singulier honneur à son disciple” (42).
In her testament, dated 5 February 1645, Jamyn makes a donation to a convent at Saint-Germain-des-Prêts with a certain condition, should she die before Gournay.

. . . pour les obligations particulieres qu’elle recoignoit avoir à Marie de Jars, Damoselle de Gournay, pour les biens faictz qu’elle en a receus pendant les longz services qu’elle luy a rendus, pour luy ayder à vivre le reste de ses jours plus comodement, icelle pension viagere estre continuee à ladicte Damoselle de Gournay . . .

The close bonds between Gournay and Jamyn, as witnessed through their respective wills, support the theory put forth here that Gournay knew Jamyn was not the daughter of Ronsard’s friend, even though there may have been some extended family ties between them. Instead, until the early twentieth century, Gournay remained associated, albeit mistakenly, with Ronsard. By her public description of her maid as a daughter of Amadis Jamyn, Gournay drew a crafty parallel between herself and Ronsard. In this process, Gournay becomes a copy of Ronsard who has a Jamyn serving her. At the very least, she longed to subtly interweave her name with that of one of the most prestigious authors in French literary history. As Pierre Barrière writes, Ronsard continues to hold an influential position in French literary history, equalled perhaps only by Hugo.

Gournay’s copy, however, is a flawed copy on several levels, most obviously due to the fact that there was no father/daughter relationship between Amadis and Nicole

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210 For a time their marital residence was Gournay’s apartment which Jamyn had kept.
211 Cauchie (26) advances that some family ties must have existed since both of Nicole Jamyn’s parents, François Jamyn and Claude le Grand, were from the same region as Amadis Jamyn, who was a native of Chaource, and two le Grand women had already married two of Amadis Jamyn’s brothers.
Jamyn. On this point, she differs slightly from the eighteenth-century “originals” whose imitation is based on a false model, as McGinnis (130) points out, resulting, “not in true copy, but only in another false original.” Gournay’s imitation is faulty in a different sense. It is based on a fictitious model, a mythic filiation which is of her own creation, based on the fortuitous name of her servant. She cannot create a “true copy” because there was no true original. She can, however, fashion her public persona to create her own myth, one which presents the illusion of having similarities with such illustrious figures as Ronsard, as well as with Montaigne, Socrates, Desportes and others. There is thus an added degree of complexity between the idea of copy and original. On a second level, Gournay points out that Nicole Jamyn is the “natural” daughter of Amadis. She does so to perhaps explain Jamyn’s lower social status and her position as a servant in the Gournay household. It would follow, then, that Gournay’s false copy was based on what was already considered, at this period, as an “illegitimate” model, one of lesser worth and with fewer rights. On a third level, the model itself, Amadis Jamyn, could be considered a false original for he was known as a translator of great works and as a disciple of Ronsard.²¹³

In the case of the Jamyn story, Gournay appears as both author and character in her own comedy where she puts into flux the notions of “copy” and “original.” This is part of Gournay’s continual exercise of staging herself, of creating her own myth, out of the desperate need for acceptance in a place and time where women writers did not

²¹³ Homerian scholar Noémi Hepp views Jamyn’s translation of the Iliad as the greatest monument to Homer produced in the sixteenth century (Cited in Carrington 53).
evolve. She sets herself up as an original, in its pejorative sense, for trying to appropriate greater social status through distorted means. Although Gournay’s false representation in this affair was never brought to light in her lifetime, it draws into sharp focus the singular nature of her desire for respect and recognition. More than a century before *Le Cercle, ou Les Originaux* by Charles Palissot de Montenoy – in which “originals” fall victim to vengeance214 – Gournay’s persona becomes forever linked with the mystification she endured; she tried to control her identity which in turn controlled her.

**Ribaldry, gossip and gluttony**

Returning to Tallemant, another instance where his scant approval becomes visible is when he discusses some bantering over acceptable sexual practices. Gournay was told once that her writings led people to believe that fornication was not a sin. “Un jour qu’on luy demandoit si la pederastie n’estoit pas un crime: ‘A Dieu ne plaise,’” respondit-elle, ‘que je condamne ce que Socrate a pratiqué’ . . . mais cela est assez gaillard pour une pucelle” (380). According to Tallemant, Gournay was also adept at putting her false teeth back into her mouth to talk more easily, information he says he obtained from Boisrobert who spoke of her dentures made of sea bass teeth. “A table, quand les autres parloient, elle ostoit son ratellier et se despeschoit de doubler ses morceaux, et après, elle remettoit son ratellier pour dire sa ratellée” (380). Tallemant’s

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214 *Le Cercle* was first performed in 1755. It is a satire of Enlightenment philosophers which sets off attacks and counter-attacks in which both sides accuse each other of copying previously written material. It is during this polemic that “the negative sense of the word ‘original’ achieves ascendency” (McGinnis 136).
scathing wit does not pass on the word play in French between *dentures* and *opinion.* Arnould (2: 2024) gives the meaning for *râtelée* as “everything one has to say on a subject.” Gournay herself uses the term when referring to her opinions on rhymes. “Je juge avec les *Essais,* que la bonne Ryme ne fait pas le bon Poeme : toutefois parce qu’elle y tient lieu de nécessité pour nous, ouy mesmes d’ornement non mesprisable, je ne dédaignera pas d’en dire ma ratelée” (1: 1004). Arnould comments on Gournay’s use of *ratelée* (Note C) saying that “the word is frequent in the sixteenth century. Magne (6) also employs the term during in his 1935 fiction on the birth of the Academy. He uses the word, in quotation marks, to decorate his narrative. “M. Nicolas Faret s’était tu. Un peu penaud d’avoir donné telle ‘râtelée’ de renseignements.” Nicot’s *Thresor de la langue française* (1606) gives the example of “Ratelée. *En dire chacun sa ratelée*”. Later, in Furetière, it is a “Terme populaire, qui se dit de ceux qui disent leur avis sur quelque chose, et le plus souvent sans en estre requis. C’est le propre des femmes de causer, et de dire leur ratelée sur tout ce qui se presente . . . On appelle proverbialement deux rangées de dents bien compleettes, un beau rastelier, soit pour dire qu'elles mangent bien soit pour dire qu’elles sont belles.”

In the description of Gournay’s habits at the table, two different vices are alluded to, cackling and gluttony. Women’s verbal dexterity was a common place subject in engravings and literature of the time and thought to be biological, dating back to creation. Jacques Olivier’s well-known *Alphabet de l’imperfection et malice des femmes* (1617) enflamed the *querelle des femmes* through its original approach to the denigration and subjugation of women. Each letter of the alphabet corresponds to some vice that is
intended to prove the inferiority of women. He concludes the issue of the origins of man and woman with “Dieu formant le corps de la femme d’une côte dure & craquetande, & celui de l’homme de terre sourde & muette, c’étoit un Don préjugé que l’homme seroit de sa mesure, taciturne & silencieux, & la femme au contraire & caquetante & babillarde” (76). So according to Olivier, it is women’s nature to be gossipers and Prattlers. The humoristic depiction of women in farces and fables as sharp-tongued gossipers underscores a deeper moral problem for the community, to which Gournay was no exception. Not only can women’s speech lead to gossip and lies but women speaking out, in general, poses a more fundamental dilemma, that of social instability. The model woman of the period was closed, in body and in mind. She was not to be exposed to the exterior world for that would be contrary to chastity. Tallemant’s image of Gournay gobbling down food transforms her into a demon-like creature with long teeth, subject to gluttony, a vice predominantly displayed in the iconographic discourse in the sixteenth century. Matthews Grieco (363) explains that while men were more often accused of gluttony than were women, it was considered particularly indecent for women to exhibit a desire at all, including for food. Olivier’s opening epistle to L’Alphabet describes women as “déchirant les viandes des banquetans” (A iiij). Charles Lenient’s study of satire in the sixteenth century in France refers (8) to iconography as the “soeur et complice du pamphlet.” In his work, Lenient discusses how iconography made visible the slander and hate generated by satirical tracts.

Different engravings of the time portray Gluttony as women riding pigs, some with overt sexual allusions (Matthews Grieco 365-66). Different tales and images linking
sins and women work together, to form a sort of chain reaction in the mind, one sin of the flesh leading to another. The notion that is distilled is that a woman’s appetite must be controlled because an appetite for food will surely incite lust. The intrinsic connection between food and sexual desire is further linked to vanity in Olivier (A iiiij). “Ce visage pâle de faim découvre en toy deux apetits insatiables, l’un des richesses & l’autre des voluptez” (A iiiij). Tallemant uses these images when describing Gournay. He thereby participates in the construction of her social persona by conjuring up negative cultural symbols of female identity and by promoting their underlying ideological discourse. At first glance it may seem odd that Tallemant finishes his portrait by speaking of how Saint-Amant mistreated Gournay. “Saint-Amant l’a furieusement maltraitée; car c’est d’elle et de Maillet qu’il veut parler dans le Poète crotté” (380). Tallemant’s point of view is perhaps that Saint-Amant’s verses are gratuitous, that he picks an easy target for the express purpose of ridicule, whereas his own narrative is of historical significance. If this is the case, it can be concluded that the patriarchal denigration of the female condition was so engrained in the culture that Tallemant could easily dismiss his own callous, vilifying remarks about Gournay, to consider his Historiettes as factual information.

Les Trois Racans: the “pestes” strike again

The story of the Trois Racans is found in the Historiette (382-84) Tallemant devoted to Racan, and it is probably the best known tale involving Gournay. Indeed, it is reported in numerous bibliographical accounts of her life as well as in past and present
critical evaluations of her work. It was the inspiration for Boisrobert’s play, *Les Trois Orontes. Comedie* (1653)\(^{215}\), and possibly for Sorel’s story of the “Trois Salluste” in *La Vraye Histoire de Francion*.\(^ {216}\) The knight of Bueil, a cousin of Racan’s, and Yvrande are once again involved in this practical joke, some ten years after they had requested Gournay’s autobiography in the name the King of England. As Tallemant tells the story, Gournay sent Racan a copy of her newly published *Ombre* in late 1626 or early 1627, “quoiqu’elle ne l’appellast jamais autrement que *le singe de Malherbe*” (Tallemant’s emphasis 382). When Racan decides to visit Gournay to thank her for her book, Bueil and Yvrande cannot resist the temptation to laugh at Gournay’s expense. They knew when Racan was planning to visit so they arrive first, one at a time, each presenting himself as Racan. When Beuil presents himself, “Elle lui fit mille civilitez à sa mode, et le remerca surtout de ce qu’estant jeune et bien fait, il ne desdaignoit pas de venir visiter la pauvre vieille” (383). *In her own fashion*, “à sa mode” implies that Gournay was out of fashion in her speech, too old to know how to carry on polite conversation by her contemporaries’ standards. Since her visitor was young and “bien fait,” Gournay was even more impressed which tells the reader that Gournay was not unmoved by the physical aspect of men.

Bueil tells her a few pleasant stories and leaves. Yvrande then arrives, presents himself as Racan and thanks Gournay for sending him her book. He adds that he did not want to barge in as Gournay should not be treated “comme le commun” (383).


Gournay’s criticisms of literary movements and society, in general, are focused on “le commun,” that which lacks development and culture. In her essays she rails against popular opinion, the ordinary and the ignorant. So Yvrande’s comment that she should be treated better than “le commun” plays on her values and self-esteem. Gournay is thrilled with this compliment but insists that she never sent him a book and asks her servant Jamyn to get the gentleman an Ombre. When she asks his name and he answers “Racan,” she concludes that it must be a joke: “Moy? Mademoiselle, me mocquer de cette heroine, de la fille d’alliance du grand Montaigne,” responds Yvrande who then refers to a Lipse’s letter, citing: “Videamus quid sit paritura ista virgo!” After which Gournay thinks that the person who just left must have been the real prankster. “La jeunesse peut rire de la vieillesse. Je suis toujours bien aise d’avoir veû deux gentilshommes si bien faits et si spirituels” (383). Again there is an emphasis on her age and her lack of connection to the world. If she did in fact make the comment herself – which corresponds to her reactions in other situations - she makes herself a willing participant in the game, thereby softening the blow of the prank. When the true Racan arrives later and presents himself, Gournay yells, “Voyez, Jamyn, le joly personage! Au moins les deux autres estoient-ils plaisans. Mais cetui-ci est un meschant bouffon . . . mais vous estes le plus sot des trois. Merdieu!” (384). Gournay screams, causing people to come up to her apartment, and Racan runs out. As Tallemant tells the story, when Gournay learns the truth she is in such despair for having thrown Racan out that she goes to his house early the morning and finds him in bed. When she pulls back the curtain to his bed, he runs to hide. After Gournay apologizes profusely, they become good friends. Supposedly Boisrobert performed his
play for Racan who was so amused he was brought to tears. In this story Gournay is little more than a caricature.

Tallemant’s impact on future generations of critics and readers in general is undeniable and this is especially true in Gournay’s case. It is through the patronizing, belittling filter of his Historiette that her persona was shaped to the detriment of her literary work. Gournay emerges as a gullible old woman, avid for recognition, forever locked in the past when she walked with Montaigne.
“Mademoiselle de Gournai étoit une espèce de prude . . . & mademoiselle de Gournai n’etoit nullement jolie. Dans plusieurs écrits néanmoins, on la taxa de galanterie. . . .” So begins Honoré Lacome de Prézel’s simplistic, overtly condescending and derogatory description (108) of Gournay in *Dictionnaire des portraits historiques* (1768).217 The eighteenth century would even further amplify the misogyny of Gournay’s contemporaries, finding little, if nothing of interest in her works. Claude-Pierre Goujet’s *Bibliothèque françoise* (1757)218 would criticize her person, and attack her work with mocking vehemence. After describing the satires featuring Gournay, Goujet renders his scathing judgment:

Ces railleries, non plus que les meilleures raisons, ne corrigerent point la Demoiselle de Gournay; son entêtement dura autant que sa vie, de même que sa passion pour la Poésie Françoise, pour laquelle elle n’avoit absolument aucun talent. Cette fille d’alliance du célèbre Montagne, qui n’avoit ni le génie, ni le naturel de cet Ecrivain . . . ne vouloit rimer qu’à la maniere de Ronsard, de Desportes, de du Bellay: ceux ci étoient ses héros, & elle les imitoit plus dans leurs défauts, que dans ce qu’ils pouvoient avoir d’estimable. (47)

Gournay was untalented, unreasonable and a poor imitator of her idols, an *originale*, whom he sought to “correct,” in an act of vengeance in the name of literary history.

In the nineteenth century, however, she would finally find favor among some critics: Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Léon Feugère and Paul Bonnefon would all speak positively of Gournay’s literary positions, her authorial mission corresponding better to their “horizon of expectations,” than it did to that of critics such as Prézel and Goujet. It is quite probable that this turning point was a result of nineteenth-century romanticism after which critics received her protests against linguistic purification more favorably. The oreille favorable that Gournay had been hoping for in *Advis* would be short-lived, however, and she was virtually abandoned until Mario Schiff wrote the first twentieth-century critique of Gournay, *Marie de Gournay: la fille d’alliance de Montaigne* (1910).

Schiff’s work has the merit of reintroducing Gournay and her major themes to new readers. However, his critique testifies to the historical importance of *Historiettes* in the construction of her persona: “Il est tout à fait impossible de parler de Mademoiselle de Gournay sans donner la parole au savoureux auteur des ‘Historiettes’” (40). In this unfortunately reductive comment, the content of Gournay’s texts cannot be examined without delighting in the stories of her degradation. In doing so, Schiff echoes the patriarchal structures and cultural constraints that led to the mystifying practices against Gournay. He throws his support to Tallemant, “qui est moins injuste et moins mauvais langue qu’on ne l’a dit” in his depictions of Gournay (45), concluding his critique by giving the “proof” of her good sense: “elle a été dévouée à la mémoire de Montaigne; elle

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Noiset addresses this point in ‘Marie de Gournay,” 200.
a admiré Ronsard; elle a eu son avis sur toutes sortes de questions et, en dépit de sa jupe, elle a su le dire hautement” (52-53). Twentieth-century feminism would find in Gournay, to paraphrase Jauss, the implicit response to a question that it is befitting to ask her now (247). Yet in spite of this revival of interest, a double discourse on Gournay still exists today. Nancy Frelick rightly condemns critics who hold an ambiguous position “promoting Gournay studies on the one hand (by editing her work), while also subtly undermining her status as a writer on the other hand by continuing to perpetuate remnants of unexamined misogynist and modernist discourses in their work” (177). Indeed, as late as the 1990’s, critics such as Constant Venesoen would still question whether Gournay did not refuse her “feminine” sexuality by refusing the “charm, seduction, beauty and control over men” that characterize women (Études 23). As my thesis tried to demonstrate, it is not really surprising to encounter such essentializing statements still today, for the power and lasting effects of the public disciplining to which Gournay was subjected were immensely effective.

The feminine ideal that Venesoen describes is so deeply rooted in our culture that it remains largely unconscious (and intact) for both men and women. Anna Fels relays in “Do Women Lack Ambition,”220 the dashed dreams and hidden barriers that women continue to face in society, some four-hundred years after Gournay refused to embrace tradition roles. She notes that the women she studied as a psychiatrist “hated the very word ambition.” Fels asserts, “when women speak as much as men in a work situation or

compete for high-visibility positions, their femininity is routinely assailed. They are caricatured as either asexual and unattractive or promiscuous and seductive” (56). These characteristics are an updated, less overt, version of Lacome de Prézel’s “prude, nullement jolie, mais galante.” I do not assert that in order to embrace ambition, women should fabricate myths based largely on male models. But it seems to me that much can be learned by Gournay about strategies that lead to empowerment. She did not censor her ambitions, but chose to compete with men, despite the penalties to her reputation and livelihood. She fabricated a public persona which would endure a subsequent counter-fabrication. Through the study of this process, I intended to demonstrate that as the scenes and stories were told and retold, the identity Gournay had created for herself, malfunctioned in its confrontation with the dominant structures in society, for any identity produced from self-fashioning, contains within it the seeds of its own subversion.

Shortly before her death, she ended her self-fashioning with the image that Lipsius had provided her – that of the *Virgo* – a virgin, mother of texts. Her literary career had begun with this representation of her in 1593; his letter had served as her passport to the literary world and had now come full circle, conjured up again, shortly before her death in her 1644 testament. She evoked her poor orphaned book, *Advis*, that she was handing over to a trusted friend for safe-keeping. Gournay’s future reception would not characterize her, though, as a mother, a *producer* of prose, poetry or essays, but largely as the overly zealous guardian of Montaigne’s *Essais*. It is left to wonder what became of her voluminous correspondence; it could have substantially changed her future
reception. Were her letters, along with her personal copies of the *Essais* and *Advis*, hijacked by a “conspiracy of critics” in an ultimate act of silencing?

Aware as Gournay was of her own poor reception among her contemporaries, she had sought to reach out to posterity in her 1626 edition of *Ombre*. On the cover was a pine tree with the inscription *Pactura nepotibus umbram*, (extending one’s shadow to future generations). Her editor required her to change the title, judging it too enigmatic. Another “Tree of Life” is Daly’s metaphor for the power that exists in the creative opening of the Self. The silencing of women occurs when the Tree is replaced by the symbol of Christ. Gournay’s pine tree was not replaced with Christian myths, as Daly describes, but with the image of a different god, Montaigne. Her self-created mythic persona of the *Virgo nobilis*, the author, and the literary, social and political commentator, would be replaced by a *novum monstrum* of a different type. The veracity of the stories told about her hardly matters. Gournay had become *counter-fashioned*, her own myths turned against her.
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