CHAPTER 1

Querying Women's Power and Influence in French Culture

It is a peculiar and quite remarkable fact of French civilization that long before the revolutionary era, educated French writers identified women with culture, not with nature. Indeed, one of the most striking features of French history since the Renaissance is the enormous cultural power and influence that men publicly attributed to women – and, what is more, that women claimed for themselves. The most superficial rendering of this concern is embodied in the popular French cliché *cherchez la femme*, which could carry both positive and negative charges. "Men make the laws," it was commonly said before the Revolution, "but women shape the morals."[1] The implication of this oft-repeated observation was that morals were the more important of the two. In his celebrated story *Paul et Virginie* (1788), the educational writer Bernardin de Saint-Pierre argued that "women have contributed more than the *philosophes* to form and reform the nations. . . . They lay the first foundations of natural law" through their contributions as mother, comforters, inventors of everything agreeable. He perceived women as the bridge between nature and culture: "You are the flowers of life . . . You civilize the human race . . . You are the Queens of our beliefs and of our moral order."[2] But women's power could also have malevolent consequences, as Pierre Choderlos de Laclos tried to demonstrate in his four-volume 1782 novel, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.[3]

[1] See the exchange between Adélaide and Bayard ("Les hommes font les lois"/ "Les femmes font les moeurs") in Guibert's play, *Le Connétable de Bourbon* (1769), in Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte Guibert, *Oeuvres dramatiques de Guibert . . . publié par sa veuve* (Paris, 1822), vol. 10, p. 22.

[2] Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, introduction to *Paul et Virginie* (orig. publ. 1787/1788). English transl. from the 1806 ed. in Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 34.

[3] Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangeueuses*. 4 vols. (Paris: Durand Neveu, 1782). This novel, with its wicked, scheming main character Madame de Morteuil, is, like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, still in print today.

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After the Revolution, male cultural critics as diverse as the radical utopian Charles Fourier and the Catholic counterrevolutionary monarchist Louis de Bonald pointed to women's status as the *primary* index of a nation's civilization.[4] In 1825, the literary critic and writer Charles Nodier (later elected to the Académie Française) observed that "women's power seems to diminish as democracy rises," and concluded that "political liberty seems to be incompatible with the power of women."[5] In 1828 the writer Fanny Burnier Mongellaz entitled her two-volume work *De l'influence des femmes sur les moeurs et les destinées des nations, sur leurs familles et la société*.[6] Early in the July Monarchy, Prosper Enfantin and his Saint-Simonian companions set out for Egypt in search of the female Messiah, and Nodier (commenting in 1833 on the emerging current to emancipate women spearheaded by the Saint-Simonians and the women writing for *La Femme libre*) hesitated; in his mind, any progress women made in their social position would make them lose "the inappreciable advantage of protection and love that they owe to their organic delicateness, to their long and delicious childhood, to their legal minority." In Nodier's view, women's superiority in Western morals was based squarely on their physical inferiority; "if they were not weak they would never have been so powerful," he remarked. "Christianity and chivalry, which found them to be slaves, made them sovereign." He preferred the influence of women "as angels and divinities" to women free to compete in the world of men.[7] Alexis de Tocqueville investigated the condition of women in the United States and reported back in his study of *Democracy in America*, insisting on the freedom of American young women, but also on the strict sexual division of labor into public and domestic responsibilities.[8] In the 1840s the philosopher (and former secretary to the comte de Saint-Simon)

[4] The celebrated statement by Charles Fourier to the effect that "Social progress and historic changes occur by virtue of the progress of women toward liberty, and decadence of the social order occurs as the result of a decrease in the liberty of women," in his *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808) is foreshadowed by similar language in the works of well-known eighteenth-century writers, including John Millar (1771) in Scotland and A.-L. Thomas (1772) in France.

[5] Charles Nodier, "De l'influence des femmes dans un gouvernement représentatif," published in J.-A. Ségur, *Les Femmes, leur condition et leur influence dans l'ordre social, chez les différents peuples anciens et modernes* (Paris, 1825), 2nd ed., vol. 4, quotes, pp. 228, 243.

[6] Fanny Burnier Mongellaz, *De l'influence des femmes sur les moeurs et les destinées des nations, sur leurs familles et la société*. 2 vols. (Paris: Chez L. G. Michaud et chez Delaunay, 1828; 2nd ed. 1831).

[7] Charles Nodier, "La femme libre, ou de l'émancipation des femmes," *L'Europe littéraire: journal de la littérature nationale et étrangère*, n° 2 (March 1833), 11–12; quotes all 11. Consulted at Beineke Library, Yale University, 25 October 2001.

[8] See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: Vintage, 1959; orig. publ. 1840), pp. 222–225.

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Auguste Comte envisioned the worship of woman as a central tenet of his new "religion of humanity."[9] The historian Jules Michelet went so far as to enshrine "woman" (*la femme*) as the very engine of history. One does not find this kind of talk in many other world cultures.

The ongoing public debate over women's power and influence is central to understanding the woman question as a pivotal element in the politics of French culture. Yet contemporary scholars, unlike their predecessors, have long sidestepped the "problem" of French women's cultural influence. Recent historiography on women and culture has focused more on culture in the ethnographic (or artistic) sense.[10] Here I want to turn the spotlight back on the politics of French high culture and to focus it specifically on this debate over women's cultural power and influence. In the following chapter, I will show how this discussion relates to the issue of political authority.

The Social and Cultural Construction of Sex in France

Even as women in France were identified with culture, the historical record also reveals a series of concerted efforts made over centuries by educated Frenchmen to break, contain, channel, and control their influence. Well before the Revolution, France had become a veritable laboratory not only for the celebration and denigration of women, but also for conscious efforts to structure and restructure the sociopolitical implications of sexual

[9] See Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive* (Paris, 1848); cf. Comte, "The Influence of Positivism upon Women," in his *A General View of Positivism*, transl. J. H. Bridges (London, 1875; rep't ed., Stanford University Press, n.d.); see doc. 63 in *WFF*, vol. 1.

[10] An important statement by French scholars on the issue of women's culture and power in ethnohistorical perspective is Cécile Dauphin, Arlette Farge, Geneviève Fraisse, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Rose-Marie Lagrave, Michelle Perrot, Pierrette Pfzerat, Yannick Ripa, Pauline Schmitt-Pantel, & Danièle Voldman, "Culture et pouvoir des femmes: Essai d'historiographie," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* (March–April 1986), n° 2, 271–293. This article has since been published in English in the *Journal of Women's History*, 1:1 (Spring 1989), 63–88, and a revised translation appeared in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, ed. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, & Jane Rendall (London: Macmillan, 1991, & Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 107–133. "Culture" in this essay is understood in a purely anthropological sense.

In an important corrective effort to insist on the eighteenth-century tradition of identifying women with Culture (rather than with Nature), see Jane Rendall's pathbreaking essay "The Enlightenment and the Nature of Women," in Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Schocken, 1984), which focuses on the influential histories of women by the Scottish Enlightenment writers. In the same vein, see Sylvia Tomaselli, "The Enlightenment Debate on Women," *History Workshop*, n° 20 (Autumn 1985), 101–124. See also Dena Goodman's essay, "Governing the Republic of Letters: The Politics of Culture in the French Enlightenment," *History of European Ideas*, 13:3 (1991), 183–199, which explores the gender politics of the salon.

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difference, or what we now call "gender."[11] Literary historians have attributed much importance to the courtly love tradition as a vehicle for emphasizing the centrality of women in medieval France.[12] The later quarrel over the so-called *précieuses*, and the playwright Molière's humorous denigration of the *précieuses ridicules* and the *femmes savantes* has been repeatedly chronicled and deftly deconstructed.[13] Historians such as Carolyn Lougee have insisted on the importance in the early seventeenth century of Neo-Platonism as a counterweight to the asceticism of Christian tradition in reasserting the centrality of women and heterosexual human love. Lougee demonstrated early on how the woman question in that century was central to a major debate about the sociopolitical order and how the shaping of women's education, as embodied by Archbishop Fénelon's influential *Treatise on the Education of Daughters* (1687), became a key element in a project to reform French society from the top down.[14] In a study of literary misogyny in the seventeenth century, Pierre Darmon has abundantly documented the intensity and perversity of men's literary response to women's influence; Christine Fauré has demonstrated the extent to which it shaped French political theory, and Arlette Farge has examined its manifestations in the more popular stories of the *Bibliothèque Bleue*.[15] Sarah Hanley has posited the "engendering of the state" itself during this period.[16] Literary historian Joan DeJean has demonstrated that

[11] See the discussion concerning the term "gender" in this volume's general introduction, and in my two articles cited there.

[12] See the sophisticated analyses by Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*, transl. by Barbara Bray (New York, 1983; orig. publ. in French, 1981), and Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[13] See Eva Avigdor, *Coquettes et précieuses* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1982), and Domna Stanton's exposé of the literary politics of *préciosité*, "The Fiction of Préciosité and the Fear of Women," *Yale French Studies*, n° 62 (1981), 107–134.

[14] Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des femmes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 34–40.

[15] Pierre Darmon, *Mythologie de la femme dans l'Ancienne France* (Paris: Seuil, 1983); Arlette Farge, "L'Homme et la femme: un conflit qui traverse la Bibliothèque bleue," introduction to *Le Miroir des femmes* (Paris: Montalba,1982), pp. 11–81; Laure Beaumont-Maillet, *La Guerre des sexes, XVe-XIXe siècles: les albums du Cabinet des Estampes de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984); and especially Christine Fauré, *La Démocratie sans les femmes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), now in English transl. as *Democracy without Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[16] See the following essays by Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies*, 16:1 (Spring 1989), 4–27; "Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Power in Domestic and State Government, 1500–1800," *American Historical Review*, 102:1 (Feb. 1997), 27–52; "'The Jurisprudence of the Arrêts': Marital Union, Civil Society, and State Formation in France, 1550–1650," *Law and History Review,* 21:1 (Spring 2003), 1–40; and "The Family, the State, and

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women writers embedded a devastating critique of institutional marriage at the very heart of the seventeenth-century novel, which they in fact invented, while Nancy K. Miller has shown that the most important eighteenth-century novels written by men had women's stories at the heart of their narratives.[17] Historian Dena Goodman has documented the erosion of women's approaches to spelling and grammar as the all-male Académie Française took charge of consolidating the French language and, in particular, giving precedence to the "masculine" in grammar.[18] Historians of women in nineteenth-century France have repeatedly pointed out the prejudicial legal situation of French wives under the 1804 Civil Code, correctly emphasizing the stark reassertion of legal control by husbands over the persons and properties of wives.[19] But they have rarely made explicit why the jurists, the physicians, and the moralists thought it so necessary to emphasize and empower the masculine.

With this pervasive historical current of repeated acknowledgement of women's power and influence, post-revolutionary nineteenth-century Frenchmen resumed work on the project of attempting to control it through a deliberate process of reconstructing gender. As we will see in the subsequent volume, the leaders of the Third Republic, like their predecessors, would also formulate very specific views on the subject of how women's influence in France should be channeled and contained. They invested heavily in the promotion of sexual dimorphism (or sexual stratification), at once ideological and institutional, that was meant to

the Law in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Ideology of Male Right versus an Early Theory of Natural Rights," *Journal of Modern History,* 78:2 (June 2006), 289–332.

For an important analytic demonstration of seventeenth-century aristocratic women exercising power, see Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *The Historical Journal*, 32:4 (1989), 817–841.

[17] Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722–1782* (New York: Columbia University Press). Miller argues (xi) that the real audience for these novels was male, and that the underlying ideology "codes feminity [sic] in paradigms of sexual vulnerability." For a scathing analysis of how the achievements of seventeenth-century literary women were deformed and denigrated in subsequent male historiography, see Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). See also the review of Beasley's book and the author's response on *H-France*, vol. 33 & vol. 34 (both 2007).

[18] See Dena Goodman, "L'ortografe des dames: Gender and Language in the Old Regime,"*French Historical Studies*, 25:2 (Spring 2002), 191–223.

[19] See Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1973), vol. 1; James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society, 1870–1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); and Patrick Kay Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up!: The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858–1889* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982). See this volume's Chapter 2 on "Assessing the Problem of Women and Political Authority in French History."

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culminate in a set of sharply separate, yet complementary – though asymmetrical and hierarchically organized – spaces for women and for men.[20] That such ambitious schemes never entirely succeeded may itself be tribute to the power of women's influence, and to French women's ability to subvert and divert such plans toward their own ends.

Probing Women's Power and Influence

Given the importance of this project for controlling women's power and influence, it is necessary to understand what was meant by "the influence of women" in French culture. Of what was this influence perceived to consist? How did it operate? In what ways did it manifest itself in the French debate on the woman question, both in the monarchies of early modern France and during the Revolution? What would be its significance for rethinking women's situation in the wake of the Revolution and for shaping the campaigns of the organized women's rights movement that blossomed during the Third Republic? How did contemporaries, male and female, frame their approaches to this issue?

The tantalizing and oft-quoted discussion of women's influence provoked by the Goncourt brothers in the 1860s reveals multiple dimensions of the issue. In *Woman in the Eighteenth Century* (1862), Edmond and Jules de Goncourt penned a florid and undoubtedly exaggerated rhetorical portrait of women's influence on eighteenth-century political life.[21]

> Woman was the governing principle, the directing reason and the commanding voice of the eighteenth century. She was the universal and fatal cause, the origin of events, the source of things. She presided over Time, like the Fortune of her History. Nothing escaped her; within her grasp she held the King and France, the will of the sovereign and the authority of public opinion – everything! She gave orders at Court, she was mistress in her home. She held the revolutions of alliances and political systems, peace

[20] See Jennifer Heuer & Anne Verjus, "L'invention de la sphère domestique au sortir de la Révolution," *Annales Historique de la Révolution française*, (2002, n° 1), 1–28. See also Suzanne Desan's study, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). Note that I prefer to speak of spaces, not "spheres," although "spheres" will appear here and there in this book when I am quoting others.

[21] Edmond & Jules de Goncourt, *The Woman of the Eighteenth Century*, transl. Jacques Le Clercq and Ralph Roeder (New York: Minton, Balck & Company, 1927; orig. publ. in French, 1862), pp. 243–244. But see also Julia Kavanagh, *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893); this book was originally published in 1850 in London and in Philadelphia – that is, prior to the Goncourt work. Kavanagh insists (vol. 1, p. 4) on elite women's enormous power in the old regime and scolds earlier historians for "never fully or willingly acknowledg[ing] its existence."

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> and war, the literature, the arts and the fashions of the eighteenth century, as well as its destinies, in the folds of her gown; she bent them to her whim or to her passions.

This was not read by nineteenth-century contemporaries as pure hyperbole. Such extravagant historical arguments resonated – and no doubt refracted the anxieties of the French male public to whom they were primarily addressed. At that very time, Napoléon III had committed French troops to support Piedmontese forces in their war against Austria, following his liaison with the elegant Comtesse de Castiglione, who had been sent to France expressly to acquire that support by the Piedmontese prime minister – her cousin Camillo di Benso, comte de Cavour. The enemies of Empress Eugénie could credibly, though erroneously, depict her as the *machina ex dea* of the clerical party and the mistress of "distaff diplomacy." Thus, the subtext of the Goncourt brothers' argument implied a warning for the future of the Second Empire itself, based on the ominous shadow of women's influence and the blame assigned to it for the fall of the *ancien régime*.[22]

There could be no doubt that a hundred years earlier, prior to the Revolution, certain clever women had played extraordinary roles in court politics as well as in urban high culture. The brothers Goncourt may have exaggerated the phenomenon, but they did not invent it. It is significant that the celebrated eighteenth-century political philosopher Montesquieu (sensitized by his reading of François Poullain de la Barre's 1673 treatise on the equality of the sexes) had elaborated on women's role in his *Spirit of the Laws* and had provoked other civic-minded men to look critically at the phenomenon.[23] Rousseau wrote, in his epistolary novel *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761),[24] that

[22] Nancy Nichols Barker concluded that the charges brought against Eugénie for intruding into political affairs were unfounded. See her *Distaff Diplomacy: The Empress Eugénie and the Foreign Policy of the Second Empire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967). Many of these slanders are rehearsed again by Victoire Bidegain, "L'origine d'une réputation: l'image de l'impératrice Eugénie dans la société française du Second Empire (1853–1870)," in *Femmes dans la Cité, 1815–1871*, ed. Alain Corbin, Jacqueline Lalouette, & Michèle Riot-Sarcey (Paris: Creaphis, 1997), 57–67.

[23] See Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* (originally published 1748); Condorcet, *Lettres d'un bourgeois de New Haven à un citoyen de Virginie* (1787), in *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, ed. A. Condorcet O'Connor & F. Arago, 12 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1847–1849), vol. 9 (1847), p. 20. On Poullain's influence on Montesquieu's earlier *Lettres persanes*, see Bernard Magné, "Une Source de la Lettre persane XXXVIII ?," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 68 (1968): 407–414. The definitive study of Poullain de la Barre is Siep Stuurman, *François Poullain de la Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[24] J.-J. Rousseau, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), part II, letter 21. From vol. 2 of the 1823 edition (Paris: chez Mme Veuve Dabo, 1823), pp. 27–28.

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> French gallantry has given women a universal power. … Everything depends on them; nothing gets done except by them or for them. … In many matters [*dans les affaires*] they have a natural ascendance, even over their husbands, for obtaining what they want, not because they are husbands, but because they are men, and it is understood that a man will never refuse anything to any woman, even his own wife.

The marquis de Condorcet complained in the late 1780s that women would probably be angry with his own offer of "mere" civic equality, since they were so enthralled by Rousseau, who had acknowledged their empire over men (even as he attempted to curb it).[25]

Foreigners also commented on the topic of French women's influence. Writing about the same time as Condorcet, the American minister to France, Thomas Jefferson, informed General George Washington in strongly disapproving terms of the extent of Frenchwomen's *de facto* political power, a judgment seconded by Alexander Hamilton.[26] The American emissary Gouverneur Morris wrote in his diary, upon arriving in France in the spring of 1789, "We are in the land of women. … they enjoy an almost unlimited power and seem to take extreme pleasure in it." But, he added, "I am not sure that the country is the better off for it."[27]

The Americans' opinion was evidently shared by many of the French revolutionary legislators of the 1790s. After four full years of effort to demand their rights, interspersed by several years of diatribes against their participation by the Parisian and provincial press, in late 1793 French women found themselves banned from political activity by the Jacobin government. Indeed, one early twentieth-century historian of French feminism suggested that many of the French revolutionary leaders, like Jefferson, "were not far from thinking that Woman was the cause of all the faults of the tyrants," and just as centuries earlier the fathers of the Church had blamed women for the fall of Man, so the fathers of the Revolution

[25] Condorcet, *Lettres d'un bourgeois de New Haven à un citoyen de Virginie, sur l'inutilitée de partager le pouvoir législatif entre plusieurs corps* (1787); reprinted in *Oeuvres de Condorcet,* vol. 9 (1847), p. 20.

[26] Jefferson to General Washington, Paris, 4 December 1788. Orig. publ. in Thomas Jefferson, *Memoir, Correspondance, and Miscellanies*, ed. Thomas Jefferson Randolph, vol. 2 (Charlottesville, 1829), pp. 406–407. See also Alexander Hamilton's comparable expression of concern in *The Federalist* (letter n° 6, 14 November 1787), ed., with introd. & notes, Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), pp. 29–30. Jefferson's opinion on the necessity of excluding women from politics (along with children and slaves) was expressed even more firmly in his 1816 letter to Samuel Kerchival, later published in *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*,vol. 4, p. 295.

[27] Quoted in French in Jean-Jacques Fiechter, *Un Diplomate américaine sous la Terreur; les années européennes de Gouverneur Morris, 1789–1798* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), p. 55. The Morris diaries, at the Library of Congress, have never been published.

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held women accountable for the "fall of France."[28] Indeed, a closer analysis of the debate on the woman question in France prior to the revolution offers ample evidence for interpreting the undermining of women's situation in French law, capped by the Civil Code, as the consequence of a deliberate campaign by male jurists to curb women's powerful yet wholly illegitimate influence in political life.

Sexuality, Sensuality, Beauty, and Charm

What were the perceived bases of French women's power and influence? Among eighteenth-century male writers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau offered perhaps the most candid insight into the principal source of women's influence. To him, it lay purely and simply in men's inability to resist women's seductiveness, their power of sexual attraction. Like the fathers of the Church, whose doctrines Rousseau professed to despise, he perceived women as rapacious temptresses. Indeed, he preached male control and female modesty as a means of protecting men and preventing their sexual powers from being overtaxed by women. "Women," wrote Rousseau in his educational treatise *Émile* (1762),[29]

> so easily stir men's senses and awaken in the bottom of their hearts the remains of an almost extinct desire that if there were some unhappy climate on this earth where philosophy had introduced this custom, especially in warm countries where more women than men are born, the men tyrannized over by the women would at last become their victims and would be dragged to their deaths without ever being able to defend themselves.

But, he added ominously, "When the time comes that women are no longer concerned with men's well-being, men will no longer be good for anything at all."

Reason, Rousseau argued, was the tool God gave to man not only to regulate his own unlimited desires but *to control women and thereby to*

[28] Léon Abensour, *Le Problème féministe* (Paris: Radot, 1927), p. 75. The most extreme example is provided by the virulent attacks on Marie-Antoinette during the revolution; these are analyzed by Chantal Thomas, *La Reine scélérate: Marie-Antoinette dans les pamphlets* (Paris: Seuil, 1989); Elizabeth Colwill, "Just Another Citoyenne? Marie-Antoinette on Trial, 1790–1793," *History Workshop*, n° 28 (Autumn 1989), 63–87; and Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 108–130. A nineteenth-century example is Edouard de Beaumont, *L'Épée et les femmes* (Paris, 1881; in English as *The Sword and Womankind*, New York: Panurge Press, 1929), which blames men's "emasculation" on women's intrigues and men's abandonment of the sword as a weapon of war.

[29] From J.-J. Rousseau, *Émile*, as retranslated in *WFF*, vol. 1, doc. 10, p. 45.

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ensure that women remained preoccupied with men's well-being. "Woman was specifically made to please man," he insisted. This was, on Rousseau's part, a deliberate assertion, not an assumption. It was prescriptive, not descriptive. His point could not have been more politically explicit. No French writer, even in the nineteenth century, would ever underrate (or attempt to neutralize by denying) the power of female sexuality and seductiveness in the way that Dr. William Acton and others effectively did in the English context.[30]

Twentieth-century academic historians, until very recently, had systematically skirted discussion of the sensual bases of women's influence, despite the force of the evidence that attests to its importance.[31] Another way of approaching this question is to consider the historical significance of women's beauty, as historian Christine Adams is doing. Writing about Thérésia Cabarrus, later Madame Tallien, whose contribution to ending the Terror through her influence on Tallien has become the stuff of legend ("Notre Dame de Thermidor") and whose importance during the Directory was underscored by all observers, Adams asks readers to take seriously the sheer aesthetic appeal that gave some women celebrity status and underpinned not only their social influence but also their political influence, as in Madame Tallien's case. When beauty was coupled with a self-consciousness of the positive work beauty and fashion could do by influencing men to behave in high-minded and generous ways, it could and seemingly did sometimes work miracles.[32] Even Napoléon was for a time influenced by her charms, but later banished her from court and even from contact with her former best friend Josephine Beauharnais, who as Napoléon's wife became Empress.

But neither sensuality nor beauty was the sole factor underpinning women's power and influence. A second aspect of Frenchwomen's influence was underscored by the Goncourt brothers' contemporary, the historian Jules Michelet, who inadvertently emphasized the importance of kinship networks and relative age at marriage to women's empowerment. In his book, *La Femme* (1859), Michelet would offer counsel to young men

[30] See the much-discussed characterization of women's ostensible "lack of sexual feeling" by the British physician, William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857), reprinted in *Victorian Women*, eds. Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, & Karen Offen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1981), doc. 37 (ii), pp. 177–179. I return to this issue in Chapter 3.

[31] See Arthur Mitzman, "Michelet and the Republican Mission, 1868–70: The Policing of Eros," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3:1 (1992), 1–32.

[32] See Christine Adams, "Venus of the Capitol': Madame Tallien and the Politics of Beauty under the Directory," *French Historical Studies*, 37:4 (Fall 2014), 599–629.

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concerning the choice of wives. His advice is revealing. Significantly, he urged them to choose much younger women with no families of their own. Only thus could a woman be molded by her husband to suit his express wishes.[33] Only thus could he play Pygmalion. Michelet was as suspicious of women who had been trained by other women as of those who were under the influence of priests. Clearly, Michelet considered that women who were in close contact with kin networks, female networks, or who were close in age to their husbands might neither be pliable nor obedient – nor interested exclusively in a husband's well-being. In order to assert male authority in the household, Michelet's ideal scheme for the husband, men must isolate women in order to dominate them; only then could men securely worship them. Implicit in his argument was the fear that a woman who was a man's peer – or who had access to networks outside her own doors – would dominate him![34] In short, to Michelet, women's freedom meant men's ruin.

The Goncourt brothers also offered a third explanation. Discounting women's charms, they insisted that the power of women in France derived from their [emotional] intelligence. Women, they believed, possessed an uncanny insight into human nature, an instinctive intelligence (we would call it "women's intuition") that allowed them to develop strategic skill at managing men.[35] This point would be constantly underscored by women writers as well; for example, the Anglo-French journalist Claire de Pratz, in her 1912 book *France from Within*, reported that "Her [a woman's] power lies exclusively in what men call her womanly charm, which in reality is her intense faculty for the sympathetic assimilation of the ideas and even the passions and emotions of others."[36] Earlier she had underscored that "France is a woman's country. The Frenchman is devoted to the cult of

[33] Jules Michelet, *La Femme*, as reprinted in *WFF*, vol. 1, doc. 97, p. 340. The fascination of some notable male writers, perhaps inspired by the Pygmalion myth, with discovering and shaping the *jeune fille sauvage* dates from at least 1755; see the *Histoire d'une jeune fille sauvage, trouvée dans les bois à l'age de dix ans, publiés par Madame H...t, (1751) . . . suivi de documents annexes et présenté par Franck Tinland* (Bordeaux: Duclos, 1970). In *France from Within* (London & New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), Claire de Pratz also speaks to this issue of men's desire to "form" their younger wives.

[34] Such fears were evidently commonplace in French peasant societies; see Martine Segalen, *Mari et femme dans la société paysanne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), pp. 149–152. A similar point is made concerning the power of women in French urban working-class families by Michelle Perrot, "De la Nourrice à l'employée: Travaux de femmes dans la France du XIXe siècle," *Le Mouvement social*, nº 105 (October–December 1978), 4.

[35] Goncourt & Goncourt, *Woman*, chapter 9: "The Domination and Intelligence of Woman," esp. pp. 246–248.

[36] De Pratz, *France from Within*, p. 163.

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Woman. He adores *la femme*, and he is more than nine-tenths convinced that she is the better half of humanity. In his home life, as in his business – be that what it may – he consults his wife upon every detail, and the Frenchman's most intimate counsellor [sic] and friend is always his wife, mother or sister."[37] Was this too much of a good thing?

The poet Gérard de Nerval, translator of Goethe's *Faust* and seeker of the "Eternal Feminine," offered a fourth, and complementary explanation, concerning male insecurity, in his *Voyage en Orient* (1851):[38]

> Yes, let us be young in Europe as long as we can, but go to spend our old age in the Orient, the country of men worthy of the name, the land of the patriarchs. In Europe, where our institutions have suppressed physical strength, woman has become too powerful. With all that power of seduction, of ruse, of perseverance and persuasion with which heaven has endowed her, the woman of our own countries has become socially the equal of man, and this was more than was necessary to ensure that he should inevitably and eternally become her victim.

Emerging from this somewhat random cluster of widely read male and female authors is a multifaceted acknowledgement of women's influence, no element of which in any way treats women as negligible or oppressed creatures. In these men's eyes, women were empowered not only by their sexual attractiveness, but also by their kin networks, their innate emotional as well as rational intelligence, and their associations with other women, which all but rendered superfluous men's advantage of physical strength. Taken together, these insights, particularly those of the male writers, provide us with a searing portrait of masculine psychological insecurity in face of the fearsome specter of unbridled female power. Historian Joan Landes has remarked that "the structures of modern republican politics can be construed as part of an elaborate defense against women's power and public presence."[39] The evidence I have accumulated attests to the fact that such elaborate defenses were being constructed and reconstructed under the successive monarchies, centuries before the advent of modern republican politics. There is nothing particularly "republican" about male anxieties, though it could be said that male anxieties in the French context have sometimes exploded in acutely aggressive forms.

[37] Claire de Pratz, "French Women and English Women," *Votes for Women* (February 1908), 64.

[38] Gerard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient* (Paris: Charpentier, 1851); as translated in *The Women of Cairo: Scenes of Life in the Orient,* vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), p. 36. Nerval's musings seem to have been stimulated by his purchase of a young, and presumably docile, slave girl.

[39] Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 203–204.

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Those French men who did worry about female power and influence continually felt the necessity of taking exceptional measures to assert their manly authority in a situation in which they perceived themselves as "merely" legally dominant. With the combined forces of law, prescription, and custom – and physical strength – behind them, it is highly illuminating to recognize that such men remained insecure, still obsessively worried about controlling women. Must all women be inevitably seen as "daughters of Eve"? Must woman, then, remain a "muse" or a "madonna" in order to render herself less threatening to the male of the species?[40] Was the "woman question," ultimately, a Man Problem, an unresolvable problem of male identity and anxieties about masculinity?[41] Is the entire debate on the woman question simply evidence of repeated efforts to stabilize male gender identity by imposing limits or constraints on troubling, invasive female "other," as contemporary cultural theorists might put it?

French Women Acknowledge and Applaud Women's Influence

And here I turn to the examination of women's words on this subject. What I find remarkable is that French women, not least the feminists among them, were equally assertive about the significance of women's influence and recognized the necessity of channeling it to constructive use through better education. Mongellaz was by no means the only one to develop this theme. In the 1833 prospectus for her publication, *Le Conseiller des Femmes* [Women's Counselor], the Saint-Simonian and women's rights advocate Éugénie Niboyet likewise insisted on the power of women's influence, despite their de facto political powerlessness; in 1849 the feminist activist Jeanne Deroin made a similar point.[42] The feminist novelist and essayist André Léo (Léodile Béra, veuve Champseix) underscored the point again in 1869, when she wrote that women's "influence, though difficult to pin down in ordinary times, nevertheless exists. The heart of the matter is to know whether this influence should be instinctive or cultivated, ... whether it should be exercised in broad daylight or in the shadows." And in Hubertine Auclert's pro-suffrage

[40] See Stéphane Michaud, *Muse et madone: Visages de la femme de la Révolution française aux apparitions de Lourdes* (Paris: Seuil, 1985).

[41] See my article, "Is the 'Woman Question' Really the 'Man Problem'?" in *Confronting Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle France: Bodies, Minds and Gender*, ed. Christopher E. Forth & Elinor Accampo (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010), pp. 43–62.

[42] Éugénie Niboyet, "Prospectus," *Le Conseiller des Femmes*, (1 October 1833), 2; Jeanne Deroin, "Mission de la femme," *L'Opinion des Femmes*, (28 January 1849) (see *WFF*, vol. 1, doc. 77, p. 261).

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newspaper, *La Citoyenne*, the masthead subheading asserted that "Woman is one of the driving forces [*forces vives*] of France that has been neglected for all too long."[43]

The remarks of female observers from neighboring countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also reflect the continuing fascination with this theme of women's power and influence in French culture. One recurrent refrain in the commentaries of contemporary British and American writers on the woman question during the Third Republic is that the actual position of married women in French society was dramatically better than that of their Anglo-American counterparts, despite their clearly subordinate status in French civil and political law. In 1908, for instance, the British writer Violet Stuart Wortley pointed out that "though legally [French] women occupy a much inferior status to men, in practice they constitute the superior sex. They are the 'power behind the throne,' and both in the family and in business relations undoubtedly enjoy greater consideration than English women. There are unwritten laws in their favor."[44] Exactly what these "unwritten laws" were Wortley never specified. Around 1916, Emmeline Pankhurst, the militant English suffragette, remarked to a younger French colleague that what she perceived as the hesitancy of French feminism (relative to the action-packed and controversial suffrage campaigns of the Women's Social and Political Union in Britain) could be explained by the fact that French women already had influence and knew it.[45] Such observations were repeatedly offered by outside observers to explain why feminist agitation had been less militant in France around the turn of the century than in England.

Moreover, it seemed that not all French men were as worried about women's influence as Gerard de Nerval and his associates; the number of male-feminists in France was slowly but constantly expanding. By 1909, the German reformer Kăthe Schirmacher could write that in France "for political reasons, the women's rights movement is supported by men to a degree not noticeable in any other country."[46] Schirmacher's observations were seconded by Claire de Pratz, who would remark in 1912: "I have been

[43] André Léo, *La Femme et les moeurs: liberté ou monarchie* (Paris: Au Journal *Le Droit des Femmes*, 1869), p. 7; Auclert's paper, *La Citoyenne*, issues of the late 1880s.

[44] Violet Stuart Wortley, "Feminism in England and France," *The National Review*, 51 (March–April 1908), 793–794.

[45] Reported by Louli Milhaud Sanua, *Figures féminines, 1909–1939* (Paris: Lib. Beaufils, 1946), pp. 37–38.

[46] Käthe Schirmacher, *The Modern Woman's Rights Movement: A Historical Survey*, transl. Carl Conrad Eckhardt (2nd German edn., 1909; New York, 1912; reprint edn., New York, 1971), pp. 181–182. The secretary-general of the Conseil National des Femmes Françaises, Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix,

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interested to learn from long and continued personal investigation that most of our greater representative men – politicians, writers, artists, and thinkers of all kinds – are entirely feminist in their views."[47] Indeed, such explanations seemed self-evident to contemporaries; no further elaboration was deemed necessary. What requires historical explanation, then, is the seemingly yawning chasm that existed in France between prescriptions for controlling women, whether in law or moral stricture, and the imputed power and influence women continued to enjoy in nineteenth-century French society despite their undisputed formal subordination in marriage.[48]

Indeed, acknowledgement of women's influence and power in French society remains explicit to this day at various levels of society, and it is perhaps still more visible to observers from other cultures than to the French themselves. One does not have to look back exclusively to queens and royal favorites, or to the *merveilleuses* of the Directory, or at women's important contributions to French high culture as writers, painters, musicians, actresses, singers, journalists, and so forth, or even confine oneself to looking at urban centers to find compelling evidence of women's talent and achievements and of their sense of importance, influence, and power.

Ethnographers Explore Women's Influence in the French Countryside

Research since the 1970s in French village anthropology and ethnography by feminist scholars elucidates the question of women's influence and men's anxieties from another angle and in a distinctively different time and social class milieu. One instance is provided by Lucienne Roubin's analysis of the *chambrettes*, or men's clubs of Provençal village society, a society that was still (during the 1960s) highly sex-segregated in the routines of daily life. These clubs, which have a long history, serve as "a constant and concrete indication of the existence of male society and emphasize the distance separating it from female society."[49] The

would also insist on this point; see her article, "Les Françaises dans les grandes sociétés féminines internationales," *La Revue* (1 November 1915), 456–460.

[47] De Pratz, *France from Within*, p. 169.

[48] This point seems to be entirely missed by James F. McMillan in his survey *France and Women, 1789–1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998), which dwells on women's disempowerment and mostly male prescriptions about how women should be and should be controlled, rather than the remarkable story of what women in France thought and did and how they fought back against male domination.

[49] Lucienne Roubin, "Espace masculin, espace féminin en communauté provençale," *Annales: É.S.C.*, 25 (1970), 537–560; in English, "Male Space and Female Space within the Provençal Community,"

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articulated need village men felt to separate themselves, even escape, from the world of women reveals what seems to be a psychic necessity to enforce physical boundaries between the sexes. In a parallel investigation of a small Provençal village, the American anthropologist Rayna [Rapp] Reiter reported that the women of the village perceived their own sphere, centered around the household where they were indisputably in command, to be more powerful than that of the men. Unlike the men's more public networks, which were supra-familial, professional, and collegial, women's networks were centered around kin and the village itself. Reiter also points out that however powerful a woman perceived herself to be in the village setting, once she left it and encountered the strictures of formal, male-centered political and economic institutions, she would discover quickly how circumscribed her power actually was.[50]

The research of another American ethnologist, Susan Carol Rogers, has also addressed the relationship between formalized male forms of power and the more diffuse female power, focusing on one village in Lorraine. In one study, Rogers has pointed to the ways in which (in this village) both sexes colluded in acting out a "myth" of male dominance, despite the discernable evidence that women, because they controlled household activities in that setting, actually wielded great power and influence over the men.[51] In a historical study of women's changing roles in the families of wealthy nineteenth-century Catholic industrial families in the Nord (northwest France) over three generations, Bonnie Smith also probed the extent of female power and influence. Like Reiter and Rogers, she

in *Rural Society in France: Selections from the Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, ed. Robert Forster & Orest Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 152–180. See also Maurice Agulhon, *Le Cercle dans la France bourgeoise, 1810–1848* (Paris: A. Colin, 1977), p. 53.

[50] Rayna R. Reiter, "Men and Women in the South of France: Public and Private Domains," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 252–282. See also Segalen, *Mari et femme* (see n. 34).

[51] Susan Carol Rogers, "Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance: A Model of Female/Male Interaction in Peasant Society," *American Ethnologist*, 2:4 (November 1975), 727–756. See also Rogers, "Woman's Place: A Critical Review of Anthropological Theory," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20:1 (January 1978), 123–162, for a critique of the assumptions about male domination in British and American ethnological literature, and Segalen's comparable critique of the French folklorists' interpretation of the discourse on male authority, *Mari et femme*, pp. 167–183.

For a very important cross-cultural exploration of the origins of sexual inequality, see Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981); see also Eleanor Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981). Both historical and anthropological evidence suggests that in at least some other regions of France, male dominance was no myth; see Susan Carol Rogers, "Gender in Southwestern France: The Myth of Male Dominance Revisited," *Anthropology*, 9:1–2 (1985), 65–86. Cf. also Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001).

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demonstrated that although the women's internal household world was elaborated in terms of great significance, sharp limits were nevertheless imposed on their power and influence by the increasingly expansive male-dominated political world outside the household.[52] These are admittedly discrete samplings, but taken together, they reveal a more general pattern.

Conversely, a group of women historians in France has criticized certain aspects of this ethnologically centered scholarship, charging that its authors sidestep or obscure issues of sexual politics – the power relations and hierarchies of values. They have called for closer examination of women's informal power, for studies of the dynamics of conflict, tensions, even violence, with an eye to the ways in which the power attributed to women in the household may actually be "compensatory," based on domination of women over other younger or less privileged women.[53] This remains an important agenda for research, calling for novel types of evidence. Yet it should not excuse historians from examining more easily accessible printed sources that lie, neglected, in the public record. What I find particularly intriguing about the history of the woman question, especially in the nineteenth century, is the way in which both men and women deliberately elaborated and manipulated the notions of women's power and influence to achieve particular political effects.

The Politics of Gender in France

What we are all talking about, in fact, in diverse vocabularies and from diverse disciplinary perspectives, is the politics of gender in France. And this politics of gender has a long though diversely documented past. As I have suggested in the General Introduction to this book (among other publications), for centuries the French themselves have understood gender as being socially constructed; this insight is by no means exclusive to late twentieth-century feminist scholars. Why else did the French concern themselves so seriously with the overall "education" (not merely "instruction" or schooling but also gender upbringing) of girls and boys?

One of the principal claims made throughout centuries of French cultural criticism (and reiterated by such male Enlightenment figures as Poullain de la Barre, Montesquieu, the chevalier de Jaucourt, the baron d'Holbach, and Helvétius (and not least, the cross-dressing chevalier

[52] Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).
[53] See Dauphin et al., "Culture et pouvoir des femmes" (n. 10).

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d'Éon, who read all these works) was that women's ostensible inferiority to men was entirely attributable to their inadequate education, by which they meant the combination of instruction and upbringing. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, this became a favorite theme of Enlightenment writers: It so aggravated Rousseau that he rejected the blame, retorting: "And since when is it men who concern themselves with the education of girls? Who is preventing the mothers from raising them as they please?"[54] Was he responding perhaps to the feisty Madame de Beaumer, editor of the *Journal des Dames*, who charged in March 1762 (the same year in which Rousseau published *Émile*): "If we have not been raised up in the sciences as you have, it is you who are the guilty ones." Madame d'Épinay, commenting on A.-L. Thomas's influential *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages* (1772), observed that Thomas "constantly attributes to nature what we have obviously acquired from education and institutions."[55] She went on to speak specifically about "*genre masculin*" and "*genre féminin*," stipulating that she was not referring to grammar. Essay contests addressing the question of women's education and upbringing proliferated during the 1770s and 1780s.[56] The great writer Madame de Staël insisted on the importance of institutions and education in the shaping of women.[57] She, like her predecessors, understood that gender roles were socially constructed, or as it was formulated in the French vocabulary of the time, "nature" had to be shaped, to make it acceptable to "culture."[58] Leaving aside, for a subsequent chapter

[54] In *Émile*, book V, in *WFF*, vol. 1, doc. 10.

[55] Mme de Beaumer, in *WFF*, vol. 1, doc. 2; Letter from Mme d'Épinay to the abbé Galiani, 14 March 1772; first published by Benedetto Croce, "Una lettera inedita della signora d'Épinay e il 'Dialogue sur les femmes' dell'abate Galiani," in *Mélanges d'histoire littéraire générale et comparée, offerts à Fernand Baldensperger*, 2 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1930), vol. 1, p. 178. Mme d'Épinay's text has been reprinted in A.L. Thomas, Diderot, Madame d'Épinay, *Qu'est-ce qu'une femme?, un débat, préfacé par Elisabeth Badinter* (Paris: P.O.L., 1989).

[56] Among these were the competitions sponsored by the Academy of Besançon in 1776 and by the Academy of Châlons-sur-Marne in 1783.

[57] Mme de Staël, *De la littérature* (1800), in *Oeuvres complètes de Mme la Baronne de Staël*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1820), p. 472.

[58] On the nature/culture dualism in French thought, see Maurice Bloch & Jean H. Bloch, "Women and the Dialectics of Nature in Eighteenth-Century French Thought," in *Nature, Culture, and Gender*, ed. Carol MacCormack & Marilyn Strathern (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 25–41. For a critique of its translation into the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and other influential anthropologists, see Penelope Brown & Ludmilla J. Jordanova, "Oppressive Dichotomies: The Nature/Culture Debate," in *Women in Society: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Cambridge Women's Studies Group (London: Virago, 1981), pp. 224–241. The politics of biomedical constructions of women and "nature" will be further explored in Chapter 3, this volume.

For an astute overview of recent debates in anthropology provoked by feminist criticism, see Louise Lamphere, "Feminism and Anthropology: The Struggle to Reshape our Thinking about

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(Chapter 3), a discussion of what "nature" entailed as concerned women and the family in France, let me offer several examples of the way in which nineteenth-century (i.e., post-revolutionary) male writers addressed "gender" as a cultural construct.

In his sardonic book *Physiologie de mariage* (1829), Honoré de Balzac asserted that only a small proportion of the female sex in France were in fact truly "women." "A woman," he wrote, "is a rare variety of the human race, and her principal characteristics are due to the special care men have bestowed upon its cultivation – thanks to the power of money and the moral fervor of civilization." Moreover, Balzac argued, "Love is her religion; she thinks how to please the one she loves," and "The species is in fine at once the queen of the world and the slave of passion."[59] Such men claimed to define, in short, what a "woman" was.

One particular experiment in the sociopolitical construction of gender that gained great notoriety in the counterrevolutionary nineteenth century was the production, among Christian families of the upper and upper-middle classes, of the much-celebrated type of the "*ingenue*" or "*jeune fille bien elevée*," known variously as the *demoiselle* or the *oie blanche* (white goose). This social type, which according to its champion – the historian Paule Constant – originated in the fifteenth century, "belonged to a Christian, elitist and sexist society which, through her, attained perfection." Such a young girl was raised as a saint, a pure soul, while the young man was raised as a hero. Constant deems this *jeune fille* as "*la forme parfaite de la feminité*," a daughter who becomes the chef d'oeuvre of the mother.[60] The *ingenue* was most valued when pure, innocent, trained to submission and dependence by suppressing all prospects of developing a strong personality prior to marriage; she was, in short, the naïve virgin, applauded by many members of the wealthiest and most leisured classes, and by those who aspired to join them. She was also, in effect, an art form, a luxury product made for men. The model seems to have been devised specifically to thwart, or at least to delay, the blossoming of womanly power and influence, and concomitantly awareness of the potency of female sexuality – at least until the rude awakening of marriage and copulation.

In 1880, Guy de Maupassant, critical of the emerging campaign for women's rights and its supporters, would insist that men should [continue

Gender," in *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, ed. Christie Farnham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 11–33.

59 Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage* (Paris, 1829), as transl. in *The Works of Honoré de Balzac*, ed. William P. Trent, vols. 33–34 (New York, n.d.), pp. 23–24.

60 See Paule Constant, *Un monde à l'usage des demoiselles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), quotes, pp. 359, 14.

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to] demand that women be "the charm and luxury of their existence." "When woman demands her rights, let us accord her only one: the right to please."[61] However, the committed revolutionary Louise Michel never understood why, intelligence being in rather short supply, one would want to cripple the intelligence of any creature, remarking that "Little girls are brought up in foolishness and are expressly disarmed so that men can deceive them more easily. That is what men want. It is precisely as if someone threw you into the water after having forbidden you to learn to swim or even after having tied your arms and legs."[62] Some thirty years later, in a post-war essay, the novelist Colette Yver would describe the self-same *jeune fille bien élévée*: "Their personalities had been worked like metal. Their excellent education had made them up just as cosmetics make up a face." "They were raised, in short, for men."[63] In effect, these artificial creations would become sacrificial lambs on the altar of French masculine hegemony, as feminist critics who espoused a far different, more self-empowering education for girls would point out.

What seems most appalling to twenty-first century critics about the model of the *jeune fille bien elévée* is undoubtedly the fact that so many other women – mothers, grandmothers, aunts, directors of convent schools – colluded in producing this product, ostensibly pleasing to God, but in fact designed and designated for men's pleasure and rule – "the right to please." Indeed, much as in the case of Chinese foot binding or female genital circumcision in Africa, the fact of female collusion (or was it merely acquiescence) in the education of these "white geese" is inescapable. Even so, there were not a few women who managed to escape or who were "improperly" or "inadequately" socialized to this model, Louise Michel among them. A small number of such women became leading writers, such as George Sand, who (perhaps because her antecedents were not middle class) was allowed to run free as a girl. Clémence Royer would become a great scientific observer, denouncing the sexual politics of knowledge. Others, such as Maria Deraismes, Hubertine Auclert, and

[61] Guy de Maupassant, "La Lysistrata moderne," *Le Gaulois*, 30 December 1880; reprinted in his *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 16 (Paris, 1968), pp. 71–74; quote, 73.

[62] Louise Michel, *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel*, ed. & transl. by Bullitt Lowry & Elizabeth Ellington Gunter (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1981), pp. 140–141; in the French edition, *Mémoires de Louise Michel* (Paris: F. Roy, 1886), p. 107.

[63] Colette Yver, "Jeunes filles bien élevées, jeunes filles mal élevées," *Le Correspondant* (10 December 1919), 995, 1000. A second such construct was the woman made entirely for "love" where "love" was merely a synonym for sex. Another, broader notion of "love," which revolved around the love of others (*agape*) can be explored in the works of the poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore; see the publications of Marc Bertrand and the website www.desbordes-valmore.net.

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Nelly Roussel would become activists in movements for sociopolitical change, spearheading the women's movement of the Third Republic. There were also other ways, even within a household, in which such innocence could be subverted, as Émile Zola pointed out in his novel *Pot-Bouille* (1882), when he composed a scene in which the maidservant seduced the *jeune fille* and taught her the secrets of lesbian love![64] In a society in which gender was considered manipulable, and women's influence an acknowledged fact, systemic education for women could be seen both as the key to their control and to their emancipation.

The Mother-Educator Model

From the seventeenth century on, a second and competing approach to the shaping of gender roles emerged, a role that went hand-in-glove with the critique of court society and aristocratic decadence, and also fostered civic involvement. This was the model of *la mère-éducatrice*, the secular mother-educator or civic mother.

This mother-educator model took on increasing political importance among progressive reformers (from bishop Fénelon's *Treatise on the Education of Daughters* on) who were bent on *national* reform, and it blossomed in the wake of the French Revolution. Its retrospective importance lies in its strategic insistence on the positive life-giving, nurturing qualities of motherhood, and on their sociopolitical significance; it was, in fact, a supreme reply to the misogynistic literature of early modern France, in which (as Arlette Farge has pointed out) women were constantly associated by male writers with death and motherhood was never mentioned.[65] Yet

[64] See Susan Yates article, "The Enemy Within: The Maid in the Nineteenth Century French Novel," in *France: Politics, Society, Culture and International Relations. Papers from the Seventh George Rudé Seminar in French History and Civilisation, The University of Sydney, 21–23 July 1990*, ed. Robert Aldrich (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1990).

[65] Several American historians of France have explored the sex-role prescriptions encapsulated in early nineteenth-century children's stories, especially stories about girls or young women written by women for the guidance of girls. See Ann Ilan Alter, "Women Are Made, not Born: Making Bourgeois Girls into Women, France 1830–1870" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1980); and Laura S. Strumingher, *What Were Little Girls and Boys Made Of? Primary Education in Rural France, 1830–1880* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983). Of special interest for this period is the general study encompassing girls' education by Barbara Corrado Pope, "Mothers and Daughters in Early Nineteenth-Century Paris" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1981); Marie-Françoise Lévy, *Des mères en filles; l'éducation des françaises 1850–1880* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1984); Cécile Dauphin, "The Construction of Femininity in the Epistolary Manuals of Nineteenth-Century France," *The Journal of Women's Studies* (Calcutta), 1:1 (April–September 1996), 37–60; and Constant, *Monde a l'usage des demoiselles*, cited in n. 60. For attempts to subvert these messages, see the discussion on the 1860s–1870s educational reformers, especially Clarisse Coignet, in Chapter 4.

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this oppositional political character of the mother-educator model has been completely overlooked by such contemporary critics as Elisabeth Badinter, who in her writings on motherhood points only to the limitations imposed on women's autonomy by the assertion that all women possessed a "maternal instinct."[66]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the mother-educator model can be said to have incorporated a substantial measure of pro-woman thought (putting mothers in charge of children's education instead of fathers was already a decisive promotion), and it incorporated a sociopolitical role assignment, not a strictly subservient domestic one. In the post-revolutionary early nineteenth century the model was widely touted by writers of both sexes, including Catholic monarchists, Protestants, and secular republicans. In fact there was virtual unanimity among republicans that the "education" of women, both in the sense of character formation and formal instruction, must become a central concern of secular French society and the nation, precisely *because* of women's cultural importance and influence, which must not be left to manipulation and exploitation by the Church.

Partisans of the mother-educator model exhorted women to exert their power and influence over every member of the next generation. This was certainly an advance on the notion of the "white goose," the young woman shaped solely for love – and man's enchantment. Moreover, in the revolutionary context, it promised women a quasi-public role, as long as her power and influence was contained within the immediate family. In its feminist form, the mother-educator model proved to be very empowering for women; in its antifeminist form, however, it did not sustain any promise of a woman's existence as an autonomous being, or as an independent political or social actor outside the family.

Some advocates of women's emancipation would ultimately argue that women's motherliness and educational role *should* be turned outward toward educating and reshaping the entire society, to the development of a republican woman – as distinct from the mother-educator. In 1856, the redoubtable Jenny P. d'Héricourt argued that "All social vices are the product of feminine influence, from which it is impossible to escape.

For a study of gender messages in the school textbooks of the Third Republic, see the important articles and book of Linda L. Clark, especially *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne: Textbooks and the Socialization of Girls in Modern French Primary Schools* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984).

[66] Elisabeth Badinter, *L'Amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel (XVIIe – XXe siecle)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980); translated as *Mother Love, Myth and Reality: Motherhood in Modern History* (New York: Macmillan, 1981).

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The sole remedy for healing these vices is to render women's influence as salutary as it [has been], generally speaking, pernicious, and for that woman must be given her place at the side of man in political life [*la cité*], in marriage, and at work."[67] Jenny d'Héricourt and many others recognized that French men's deliberate attempts (over several centuries) to exclude their powerful, influential women from *political authority* was not inadvertent; it constituted a fundamental problem in the development of French society and culture, one that historians of France, Europe and the West more generally can no longer sweep under the rug.

[67] Jenny P. d'Héricourt, "De l'Émancipation civile des femmes," *La Ragione*, n° 82 (10 May 1856), 60–64; quote, 63. See also her subsequent article, "Le Parce Que de l'émancipation civile des femmes, " *La Ragione*, n° 84 (24 May 1856), 86–90 [Ed.: italic emphasis is in the text].

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