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By

Rudy Frédéric de Mattos

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**The Dissertation Committee for Rudy Frédéric de Mattos
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following
dissertation:**

**The Discourse of Women Writers in the French Revolution:
Olympe de Gouges and Constance de Salm**

Committee:

Robert Dawson, Supervisor

Mary Jordan Baker

Alexandra Wettlaufer

John Hoberman

Lisa L. Moore

Madeline Sutherland-Meier

The Discourse of Women Writers in the French Revolution:

Olympe de Gouges and Constance de Salm

by

Rudy Frédéric de Mattos, D.E.U.G.; Maîtrise L.L.C.E.; M.A.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Raymond and Irène de Mattos, to my in-laws, Timothy and Sharon Leyden, for their support and encouragement, and to my late grand-father, Antonio Augusto Segar Fernandes de Mattos, a noble man: "Tête haute!"

Before all, I would like to dedicate this report to my wife, Corinne Leyden de Mattos, for all her love, support and sacrifices, without whom none of this work would have been possible. Sorry for all the pain I caused you because of the dissertation.

Finally, to my children, Reece and Chloé.

I am eternally grateful to all of them.

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**The Discourse of Women Writers in the French Revolution:
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Rudy Frédéric de Mattos, Ph.D.

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Twentieth-century scholars have extensively studied how Rousseau's domestic discourse impacted the patriarchal ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and contributed to women's exclusion from the public sphere. Joan Landes, Lynn Hunt, and many others, argued that the French Revolution excluded women from the public sphere and confined them to the domestic realm. Joan Landes also argued that the patriarchal discourse was a mere reflection of social reality. In *The Other Enlightenment*, Carla Hesse argues for the women's presence in the public sphere. One of the goals of this dissertation is to contribute to the debate by analyzing the content of the counter-discourse

of selected women authors during the revolutionary era and examine how they challenged and subverted the patriarchal discourse.

In the second chapter, I reconstruct the patriarchal discourse . I first examine the official (or legal) discourse in crucial works which remain absent from major modern sources: Jean Domat's *Loix civiles dans leur order naturel* and Louis de Héricourt's *Loix ecclésiastiques de France dans leur order naturel*. Then I look at how scientists like Monroe, Roussel, Lignac, Venel, and Robert used discoveries regarding woman's physiology to create a medical discourse that justifies woman's inferiority so as to confine them into the domestic/private sphere. I examine how intellectuals such as Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu, Coyer and Laclos, reinforced women's domesticity.

In chapter 3, I examine women's participation in the early stage of the Revolution and the overt attempt by some women to claim their place in the public sphere and to challenge and subvert the oppressive patriarchal discourse through their writings.

Chapter 4 focuses on Olympe de Gouges's theater and a specific example of subversion of the patriarchal discourse: I compare the father figure in Diderot's *La Religieuse* and de Gouges's play *Le Couvent, ou les Voeux forcés*.

Finally chapter 5 examines women's involvement in the French Revolution after 1794 and Constance de Salm's attack on patriarchy.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the second half of the eighteenth century, ideas of liberty and equality for all citizens, based on the conception of a “social contract,” were entering the philosophical and political discourse. By the onset of the French Revolution, these ideas had already been assimilated into the dominant discourse. Yet, although women were granted some rights, emancipation for women in the public sphere did not fully materialize, for women had been confined to the “domestic sanctuary” of family, making “nature” – that is, the physiological nature of the female body, viewed as affecting women’s psychology – the new justification for women’s exclusion from the public realm of politics. The domestic ideology, developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (among others),¹ and echoed in the medical discourse of theoreticians such as Pierre Roussel, was to justify the exclusion of women from the public sphere and their confinement to the private sphere. Stepping out of the private sphere was seen as “unnatural,” as an aberration going against the very nature of women.

¹ Many shared Rousseau’s ideas about the differences between men and women and their respective place and role within society such as Amar, Prudhomme, Fabre d’Eglantine, Chaumette, and Robespierre to name a few.

Nonconformist acts of self-assertion by women were highly criticized, for it was considered as a sign of deviance, transgression, and revolt by women against the prevailing norms, or as a rejection or a denial of the role presumably assigned to them by the nature of their gender. Society responded to such behavior by accusing the allegedly guilty woman of “desensitization” and a lack of femininity. Female deviance – or any deviance for that matter – is usually judged harshly and the French Revolution provided the patriarchy with the opportunity and the means to further develop and implement the domestic ideology.

Many women, on the eve and in the early years of the French Revolution, encouraged by the atmosphere of reformation of the Old Regime and of the nascent Republic, challenged the authority of custom. Yet, their names fell into oblivion partly because of the male-centered discourse of the nineteenth century which mostly focused on men’s participation in the revolutionary events, and also because the patriarchy intended to minimize or even silence women’s temporary intrusion into the public sphere. Patriarchy also wanted to reinforce the domestic ideology and the idea that, while women inherently belong to the home, the public sphere is masculine. To do so, they either undermined or blamed women’s active role in the Revolution, as, for instance, was the case of Charlotte Corday, who murdered Marat in his bath. In addition,

historiographers drew a long list of men's names from all the political factions, and provided detailed accounts of their actions.

Official history has not only underestimated but also minimized the role played by women during the French Revolution, a role mostly reduced in the collective memory of French people to the women's march on Versailles during the *journées* of October 5 and 6, 1789.

The collective memory of the French people, shaped throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century by the teaching of Republican philosophy, has become particularly selective and oblivious of facts which would undermine its essence. Most of the French administrations/governments, up to the most recent ones, regardless of their political affiliations, have endlessly reiterated the necessity to reinforce the Republican ideology which guides French institutions so as to unify equally every citizen under the same banner. The French educational system, viewed simultaneously as the tool to reinforce the Republican principles (liberty, equality, fraternity, and secularism) and as the place where these principles supposedly become reality, has played a crucial role in shaping the collective memory. The Enlightenment and the Revolution are an important part of the French curriculum. Yet French education has been oblivious of women's role in both crucial periods in human history. In French literature classes, the reference to women's participation is nonexistent. In history textbooks, it rarely goes beyond the

insertion of a few illustrations and excerpts from Madame Roland's diary. This omission of many women's authors reinforces the idea of women's passivity, even their invisibility during the Enlightenment and the Revolution. In 1960, the Hachette publishing firm decided to reedit *L'Histoire*, an "ouvrage de référence" written by two historians at the beginning of the twentieth century, Albert Malet and Jules Isaac. This series of four books, familiarly called the *Malet-Isaac*, and generally considered to be a crucial reference, has been read by generations of students and pedagogues as part of their scholarly education.² Four famous historians, André Alba, Antoine Bonifacio, Jean Michaud, and Charles H. Pouthas, contributed to the 1960 re-edition of the third volume, *L'Histoire, les Révolutions 1789-1848*.³ Yet, the explanation of the crucial role played by women in the March to Versailles on October 5, 1789, is reduced to a laconic mention:

L'indignation fut grande à Paris, d'autant plus que la situation y était toujours troublée. Le pain manquait (...). Le 5 octobre plusieurs milliers de femmes en armes, traînant des canons, partirent pour Versailles : elles allaient demander du Pain. Des

² This series of books is mentioned as a reference for French history, and is reprinted every few years and is still used at both high-school and university levels, and in the preparatory classes for the "Grandes Ecoles".

³ Although forty-five years might seem a long time, the third and fourth tomes of this historiography have not been modified since the 1960 re-edition which is periodically reprinted as such (see note above). With the exception of works which specifically focus on women's participation and role in the French Revolution, the issue still remains, even today, particularly untouched in works dealing with the French Revolution in general.

milliers d'hommes les suivirent : ils exigeaient en plus que Louis XVI ratifiât immédiatement les décrets du 4 août. (...) Mais le lendemain 6 octobre, à l'aube, des émeutiers pénétrèrent dans le Château, massacrèrent des gardes du Corps et cherchèrent à entrer dans les appartements royaux. Pour apaiser le peuple et sur les conseils pressants de La Fayette, Louis XVI et Marie-Antoinette acceptèrent de quitter Versailles et d'aller à Paris le même jour.⁴

The retelling of this important event, although it is one of the most visible, important acts by women during the Revolution, is nonetheless undermined by the appropriation of the event by men. The word "Femmes" is mentioned only once, and it is eventually lost among the "émeutiers," and in "la foule." The reason for which the women gathered and marched on Versailles is shown as being simply practical, while men are invested with a greater purpose: the ratification of the decree of the night of August 4 abolishing the feudal system and ending the institutionalized inequality among the French people.

We had to wait for the rise of feminist studies in the 1970s and 1980s (particularly in France) to rethink entirely the role and participation of women in the French Revolution. It was not until the late 1980s that groundbreaking works such as *Les Femmes et la Révolution: 1789-1794* by Paul-Marie Duhet and especially the remarkable work by Dominique

⁴ Malet-Isaac, *L'histoire 3. Les Révolutions 1789-1848*, (Paris: Librairie Hachette, Collection Marabout, 1960), 39-40.

Gaudineau, *Les Citoyennes tricoteuses* were published, finally doing justice to eighteenth-century women who were silenced and excluded from the public sphere after 1794. Still today, Gaudineau's book remains the most detailed and precise study retelling the active but long-lost socio-economical and political participation by women in the making of History, on both sides of the Revolution. Thanks to these studies, long-forgotten names of women actors of the Revolution, such as Olympe de Gouges, Marie-Jeanne Roland, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe, Etta Palm d'Alders, among many others, were finally rediscovered. Those studies are the result of detailed research in the National Archives, notably on the famous "cahiers de doléances," various tracts, and trial reports.⁵ However, they mainly focus on the historical aspect of women's participation in the French Revolution.

⁵ The *Cahiers de doléances* were texts presented at the Estates-General in which each social group throughout France listed their grievances. Women were however not officially permitted to write their own *cahiers*. To know more about women writing *cahiers*, see Jane Bray, "Feminism in the French Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 80.1 (Feb., 1975): 43-62 as well as Susan Skoglund Ayres, "Women's Rights and the 'Doléances du sexe de Saint Jean de Luz et Cibour au Roi'," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 4 (1976): 32-39. For further reading on *cahiers de doléances*, I recommend the numerous studies by John Markoff who has written extensively about the topic: John Markoff, *Wave of Democracy: Social Movements and Political change* (Thousand Oaks, California, London, New Dehli: Pine Forge Press, 1996), also "Peasant Protest: The Claims of Lord, Church, and State in the Cahiers de Doleances of 1789," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32.3 (Jul., 1990): 413-454 and "Peasant Grievances and Peasant Insurrection: France in 1789," *Journal of Modern History* 62.3 (1990): 445-476 but more importantly his impressive research published in collaboration with Gilbert Shapiro: Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff, *Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers de Doleances of 1789* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998). I also suggest Robert H. Blackman, "Representation Without Revolution: Political Representation as defined in the General *Cahiers de doléances* of 1789," *French History* 15.2 (2001): 159-185.

Women's literary production during and after the Revolution, with a few exceptions, remained unstudied from a non-historical perspective until the 1990s. In general, literature by women of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century had long been neglected. *Littérature française*, published in 1976 under the direction of Claude Pichois, is representative of the histories of literature and anthologies.⁶ In volume 11, dealing with the last part of the Eighteenth Century (1778-1820), Béatrice Didier, the author, makes little mention of literary productions by women except for those by Germaine de Staël, Isabelle de Charrière, and more briefly Mesdames de Krüdener and de Genlis. The omission of other women authors could easily lead the reader to think that literature was nearly exclusively a male domain. This misconception is reinforced by the fact that only two of the twenty-seven portraits present at the beginning of the book and representing the most famous literary figures of this period are portraits of women, namely Germaine de Staël and Mme de Krüdener. The list of authors at the end of this history of literature, which Didier titled the *Dictionnaire des auteurs*, also contributes to the misconception that one might form about the literary works of the time: out of the two hundred and twenty-one names listed, only fourteen are women.

⁶ *Littérature française* is representative of most histories of French literature or anthologies. See also Pierre Brunel, *Histoire de la littérature française*. Vol.1. Paris: Bordas, 1986. 2 vols; Cerquiglin, Bernard, and Jacqueline et al. Paris: Nathan, 1984; Henri Mitterand, ed. *Littérature, textes et documents*. Paris: Nathan, 1986; Valérie Worth-Stylianou, ed., *Cassel Guide to Literature in French*. London; New York: Cassell, 1993 to name a few.

Thanks to the extensive research of feminist critics or scholars specializing in women and gender issues, women's literary production in the eighteenth century until the Revolution has been the object of an important re-examination during the last decade or so. Even though many books and articles have been published on the topic in an attempt to give literature written by women better consideration, if not a recognition equal to men's production, there remains much to be discovered concerning women's literary production during the Revolution and the early nineteenth century. The literary analysis of the text itself often remains to be done.⁷

The year 1794 is crucial to the participation of women in the Revolution. Men, who had already developed a misogynistic rhetoric, felt even more threatened by the importance that women had gained in the political sphere and therefore outlawed any kind of women's participation in public life, forbidding women's clubs or any meeting of women in public.

⁷ As we mentioned earlier, many memoirs were written by women: some of them have attracted little attention or deserve better consideration, for instance the memoirs of Louis XVI's daughter Mme Royale, Countess de Boigne, Mme de Genlis, Louise de Noailles de Dufort Duras, or that of Vigée-Lebrun, the famous woman painter. This partly results from the fact that many of these texts were published much later or only once. Louise de Dufort-Duras's memoirs were published in 1888, Henriette La Tour dUPin's *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans, 1778-1815* in 1914 by her great-grand-child. The same is also true for fictional works, such as Félicité de Choisel-Meuse's *Julie ou J'ai sauvé ma rose* published in 1807 which is an important text regarding women's right to sexuality.

The notion of public sphere is to be understood in contrast to the private sphere, which is that of the individual. Jürgen Habermas defines the concept of public sphere as:

(...) a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. (...) A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public opinion.⁸ (...) Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion (...) about matters of general interests. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receives it. (Public Sphere, 49)

For Habermas, the public sphere is characterized by the critical use or the public exercise of one's reason over issues that pertain to the common good of a community or nation. It also describes the space and the medium used to express and debate public opinion, therefore creating cultural capital. He lists the newspapers, magazines, radio and television as today's media of the public sphere.

Joan Landes, Lynn Hunt, and many other theoreticians, following the lead provided by Madelyn Gutwirth, argue that the Revolution

⁸ See Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," in *New German Critique* 3 (Autumn 1974): 49-55. This article is a translation by Sarah of John Lennox of Habermas's text which originally appeared in Fischer Lexicon, *Staat und Politik*, new edition (Frankfurt am Main, 1964): 220-226. As Peter Hohendahl explains in the footnote of this article, Habermas' concept of the public sphere cannot simply be equated with that of the crowd. His concept is directed at the institution, which to be sure only assumes concrete form through the participation of people.

excluded women from the public sphere and kept them in the domestic sphere. In *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Joan Landes argues that the patriarchal discourse was a mere reflection of social reality:

And actions cannot be conceptualized apart from the deployment of representations. The issue then, is not the symbolization (including theory) versus actions but the conjoint quality of both.⁹

In *The Other Enlightenment*, Carla Hesse, going against the widely accepted theory of women's exclusion from the public sphere, argues on the contrary for women's presence within the public sphere and positions herself on the opposite side of the debate. Carla Hesse, Dena Goodman, Katherine Kittredge and Gaudineau have focused on women's participation in the public sphere during the Revolution. Even though Hesse does not object to the "elaboration of scientific and philosophical discourses aimed at maintaining sexual hierarchy and the subordination of women to men after the collapse of Aristotelian and biblical justifications" (42), she nonetheless refutes Joan Landes's theory: "But science, philosophy, law, and politics are not mirrors of the social world" (42). Unlike Joan Landes, Hesse claims that discourses do not necessarily reflect a social reality. She offers a largely controversial perspective about

⁹ See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere, in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 9.

women's exclusion from the public sphere, opposing the traditional theory on the issue:

The collapse of the old order *was* a critical turning point for female participation in French literary culture and public life, but in precisely the opposite sense from that implied by the current historiography: As with other social groups, 1789 – that *annus mirabile* – marked a dramatic and unprecedented moment of entry for women into public life. (38)

Hesse argues that the Revolution, in fact did not limit woman's fate to a domestic role but actually opened more access to the public sphere to women. What changed during the Revolution according to Hesse, therefore, was not women's access or denial to the public realm but rather both the nature of women's public participation and the means for accessing the public sphere. Women were to abandon the traditional oral role they had played as *précieuses, salonnières* - or as *poissardes* on the other side of the social spectrum - and to adopt the highly male-dominated but not gender-restricted print culture.

To challenge Landes's argument concerning women's political exclusion during the Revolution, Carla Hesse provides many examples illustrating women's participation in the revolutionary public sphere.¹⁰

¹⁰ Among the examples mentioned by Carla Hesse as evidence of women's participation to the public sphere, one ought to mention Mlle de Lézardière's writings, such as her manuscript written in 1778 entitled *Tableau des droits réels et respectifs du monarque et des sujets depuis la fondation de la monarchie jusqu'à nos jours*; it was published in 1791 under

Whatever position we might take in the debate, we can only admit that, at least until 1794, women enjoyed access to self-expression as never before. Carla Hesse holds that the repression experienced by women during the Revolution was not in reaction to women's accession to the public realm per se, but against the subversive message they tried to convey:

Not even at the moments of greatest public anxiety about the influence of women (especially during the Terror and under Napoleon), is there evidence of systematic discrimination against writers on the basis of sex. It was content not gender that mattered. (51-52)

One of my goals is to contribute to the debate by analyzing the content of the discourse of selected women authors during the revolutionary era. The orientation of this dissertation lies somewhat inbetween both sides of the spectrum as defined by Joan Landes and Carla Hesse, even though it leans more toward the latter's theory. Adopting an historical and literary approach, I intend to show, like Hesse, that not all women during the Revolution were excluded from the public sphere and cast into a voiceless private realm, as it has been argued by Joan Landes, but that many were extremely active in challenging the male discourse of domesticity and publicity as defined by Habermas.

the title *Esprit des lois canoniques et politiques*. She also authored other political works such as the *Théorie des lois positives de la monarchie française* (1792).

I will examine the overt attempt by selected women to claim their place in the public sphere and to subvert the oppressive patriarchal hegemonic discourse through their literary works. The term patriarchy normally refers to the question of the lineage and the means to insure its legitimacy. As Claire Goldberg Moses explains in *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*:

(...) the major characteristics of the patriarchal family in Western cultures are the insistence on legitimacy, since descent is through the male line and paternity must be certain; the insistence that the wife be economically dependent on the male head of the family, and the exclusion of women from civil or political participation.¹¹

I will also use the term patriarchy in a much wider sense to describe the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women (and children) in the family and in society in general. Thus, I personally extend the definition of patriarchy to any sexist, gender- or male-centered ideology or institution which seeks to implement or reinforce male domination or the belief of male superiority over women.

The choice of Olympe de Gouges and Constance de Salm as the authors on which I will focus is meant to reflect the three different periods which mark women's progressive disappearance from the public sphere and their increasing confinement to the domestic sphere: Olympe de

¹¹ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State

Gouges for the first half of the Revolution (1789-1793), and Constance de Salm for the second half of the Revolution (1794-1799) and for the Empire or Napoleonic era (1799-1814).

Olympe de Gouges was considered by her contemporaries to be one of the most disturbing voices of the Revolution, attacking the hegemony of patriarchal discourse in order to subvert it. She played an active political role during the early Revolution, defying republican expectations of female virtue; in other words she rejected the political passivity expected from women by the defenders of the patriarchal order. The public execution of de Gouges and Roland, among many others, served as a demonstration to all women that any public attempts to alter gender-based social structures would be severely sanctioned by the New Regime. The people were constantly reminded by the revolutionary hegemonic discourse conveyed in the revolutionary press, by the *Assemblée Nationale* and the justice courts, that women seeking political and intellectual independence and access to the public arena had forgotten the virtue demanded by men of their sex. Political activism (or feminist demands) by women was a crime meriting death by the guillotine. Others, like Louise de Kéralio-Robert, who fell into political disgrace with her husband in 1795 and died in exile in Brussels as a grocer, fled, thereby stepping out of the public sphere.

University of New York Press, 1984), 1-2.

On the other hand, Constance de Salm (1767-1845), a feminist and *femme philosophe*, although she is virtually forgotten today, was prominent in her time. Salm's work sheds new light on the ways women contributed to the emergence of a female literary (and to some extent political) sphere of the early nineteenth century. Examination of two of her *Epistles*, namely *Epître aux femmes* (1797) and *Epître à l'Empereur Napoléon* (1810), criticizing the *Code civil*, conveys the complexity and significance of woman's public place in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The fates of these two authors, however, differ, for Olympe de Gouges was beheaded for having presumably "[conspiré] contre la République, une et indivisible" and for having "[tenté] d'introduire la guerre civile," whereas Constance de Salm, like Claire de Duras and Germaine de Staël, went on to enjoy a prominent position after the Revolution.¹²

In this dissertation, I look at different cultural and literary constructs of gender discourse during the late eighteenth century. I call attention to women's participation in the Revolution, and especially to the works of Olympe de Gouges and Constance de Salm; I am particularly concerned with the ways they subvert (overtly and covertly) the power structures determining male/female relations, and with the ways they

¹² Quoted by Paul de Roux in his introduction to *Mémoires de Madame de Roland* 27. Similar charges against Gouges can be found in a transcript of her trial in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795*, ed. Levy, Appelwhite and Johnson 254-59.

recast or redefine social norms which they felt to be oppressive. This dissertation, therefore, has several purposes. First, in mapping briefly woman's presence in the public sphere from the Revolution to the Restoration, I will show that the separation between public and private spheres was not as clearly delimited and gender-based as Joan Landes would have us believe. Secondly, I will examine the forces of social control that made de Gouges's works and actions so controversial to her contemporaries. Thirdly, I intend to look at the ways these women authors in particular reacted to such forces. I will examine how the texts of these authors defied and subverted the code of behavior for women conventionally assigned to women.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, I retrace the construction of the hegemonic discourse. I will first examine the official (or legal) discourse, through two crucial works, Jean Domat's *Lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel* (1689) and Louis de Héricourt's *Lois ecclésiastiques de France dans leur ordre naturel* (1736).¹³ These two works have been ignored by all feminist critics. Much of the legal structure of the Old Order is in those texts which were known to everyone with any interest in the law. These

¹³ First published in 1689, Domat's *Lois civiles* was published many times throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the major editions include those of 1767, 1771, 1789, 1810, 1821 and 1828. It was also translated into several languages including English (in 1722), Italian (in 1789 and 1790) and Spanish. For Domat, I recommend Rodolfo Batiza, *Concerning the Code Civil of 1808, Facts and Speculation: a Rejoinder* (Tulane Law Review, 1972).

works also contain the basis for the sexist legal underpinnings of the Old Order. Domat's *Lois civiles* inspired the *Napoleonic Code* which reinstated and reaffirmed even more strongly many aspects of the patriarchal system.

Then, I will look at the mid- and late eighteenth century intellectual (scientific and literary) discourse on woman's place and "nature," a discourse which was used to justify woman's inferiority so as to confine her to the domestic/private sphere. Regarding the scientific discourse, I will show how medical findings regarding woman's physiology helped shape the domestic discourse. In particular, I will argue that Monroe's study of the female skeleton, as well as the works of physiologists and physicians, like Roussel, Lignac, Venel and Robert, all contributed to support and form the ideology of sexist discourse of male domination. The legal and medical issues with their sexist thrust permeated the literature of the period since both groups reflect a misogynistic zeitgeist. Furthermore, the transition from the legal and medical texts to belles-lettres illustrates the transition of such discourse into mainstream ideology.

For the literary discourse, I will look at some famous authors, and some not so famous, to show how pervasive the patriarchy was. My discussion is not intended to be exhaustive so much as representative, so as to show the wide extent of the problem faced by women. As is well

known, Rousseau's definition of the feminine ideal played an important part in limiting women's role to that of housewife and in confining them to the domestic realm. Rousseau's view of women's physiology not only reinforced his conception of the domesticated female, but also constituted the dominant theory of female deviance in the late eighteenth century. The theories then developed explain women's continued exclusion from the public sphere by concentrating on the female body, which presumably helped to explain woman's intellectual inferiority. Although Diderot was far more nuanced and subtle than Rousseau, he was also influential in asserting the domestic ideology. They were not alone. Such ideas on women permeated the writings of many others, like Restif de la Bretonne or the Cardinal de Bernis for example, throughout the eighteenth century, whether serious or satirical. In a chronological order I look at Montesquieu (for the early part of the century and because of the enormous impact of the *Lettres persanes*), then abbé Coyer (for the mid-century), and Choderlos de Laclos and Riccoboni (for the pre-Revolution).

While I very briefly allude to Montesquieu and Laclos, I focus on Coyer. Coyer's *Bagatelles morales* present mid-century attitudes symptomatic of the rest of the century and remain in general ignored in major research about women. The importance of Coyer's *L'Année merveilleuse, ou Les Hommes-femmes* not only lies in the fact that it is a paradigmatic example of the misogynistic discourse of the period but also

in the polemic it created. Among the rejoinders published almost immediately, the *Lettre en réponse à L'Année merveilleuse* written by Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, a literary icon especially for children's literature, constitutes an attack of Coyer's (therefore men's) narrow, sexist conception of woman. As Joan H. Steward shows in *Gynographs*, "the interest of this polemic for a study of women novelists lies in its articulation of the very conditions of possibility for feminist writing in the late eighteenth century."¹⁴

In Chapter 2, in order to explain and codify what women were up against, I briefly refer to a small number of women authors (namely Leprince de Beaumont, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, and Madame d'Épinay) who responded directly to attacks by men. This historical context provides a critical framework for the analysis of de Gouges's texts, including her autobiographical novels, her treatise on women's citizenship, but primarily her dramatic works.

Subsequent chapters deal with specific examples of women's attempts to gain a position in the new political sphere by subverting or overtly challenging the patriarchal discourse. In the third chapter, I will look at women's literary responses to the patriarchal ideology during the first stage of the Revolution and women's presence in the public sphere.

¹⁴ Joan Hinde Steward, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993), 24.

Chapter 4 provides a close reading of one of de Gouges's texts and shows how the Revolution enabled the author to undermine the patriarchal order and to publicly demand women's insertion into the political sphere. De Gouges's autobiographical novel, *Mémoires de Madame de Valmont*, and her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* are representative of her work, but the exegesis is often limited to these two. I have chosen to look at some of de Gouges's political writing composed in the midst of the Revolution and the rising Terror (1788-1793), a period of constant political disruption when ideas about gender and gender-based relations were constantly debated. Because de Gouges raised daring questions about citizenship and individual rights for women, I will look at her dramatic work written during the Revolution, concentrating on one of her plays, *Le Couvent, ou les Voeux forcés* (1790). Like *Le Prêlat d'autrefois, ou Sophie et Saint-Elme*, played and published posthumously in 1794, this play deals with a custom abolished in 1790 that concerns particularly women, forced vows. Theater played a crucial role in de Gouges's writing and political posturing. She uses the theatrical stage as her own political stage: she denounces both publicly and subversively the patriarchal discourse which established the subordination of women to men; she also offers other alternatives.

In Chapter 5, the long-forgotten presence of women in the political sphere after 1794 is mapped. I show that, in spite of the legal measures

taken by the government during the Terror, women did not lose entirely the visibility that they had gained during the first part of the Revolution. After looking at women's political presence, I examine two literary texts by Constance de Salm (1767-1845), the *Epître aux femmes* (1797) and the *Epître à l'Empereur Napoléon* (1810). These two texts are important in our understanding of women's history and how it relates to domesticity. The former, while asserting woman's right to access the artistic and literary spheres, gives us a glimpse of a woman's contestation vis-à-vis male conception of domesticity. The *Epître à l'Empereur Napoléon* constitutes a direct response to the misogynistic *Code pénal* of 1810 which reinforces woman's inferiority and subordination to man established by the *Code Civil* or *Code Napoléon* of 1804. This text is also important because it was read by the instigator of these measures, Napoléon, to whom it was addressed: the author handed it to the Emperor before its publication many years later.

Before examining the subversive attacks on the hegemonic discourse by women authors, we must first examine male discourse. What exactly did it claim? Was it a fixed discourse or did it evolve throughout the second half of the eighteenth century? If so, how did it evolve? In the following chapter, I will examine the construction of the eighteenth-century patriarchal hegemonic discourse which was to lead to a discourse of women's exclusion from the public sphere during the Revolution. I will

show that there is a progressive evolution in the conception of woman's nature and role from an Aristotelian and ecclesiastic discourse to the domestic discourse.

Throughout, various questions will be explored. How did the established notions of femininity and female nature (as defined in Chapter 1) enter into each author's conception of herself and of gender? How did Olympe de Gouges, Constance de Salm, and other women authors position themselves as active subjects and as authors, in a society in which female passivity was a cultural imperative? How did the development of new political identities and the concept of the "individual" or of "individual rights" affect their understanding of cultural and social hierarchies of power in the late eighteenth century. And, mostly, how did they deconstruct and attack the patriarchal discourse?

These writings, each in its way, serve not only as testimony to the events of the Revolution, but can also be seen as evidence of the ideological shifts concerning gender issues and concepts concerning the public versus private sphere. These writers' fascination with gender issues, and their struggles to define themselves within the developing cultural codes of domestic ideology, are omnipresent. The study of gender helps to illuminate not only the ways in which these authors understood the socially imposed hierarchies of power in the late eighteenth and the

first part of the nineteenth centuries, but also how they worked within and against such restrictions.

Chapter 2

Reconstructing the Discourse: Evolution and Changes in the Eighteenth-Century Patriarchal Discourse on Women's Place and Her "Nature".

A. Introduction

During the Enlightenment, various discourses (legal, religious, political, cultural, and economic) reflected an ongoing debate on gender roles. In the years preceding the French Revolution, we can see in these discourses a transformation in the thought about gender relations. Many critics, including Lynn Hunt, Joan Landes, Dorinda Outram, and Thomas Laqueur, agree that the way in which gender was understood changed dramatically as a result of and in relation to the development of liberal political theory.¹⁵ The idea of a social contract and the promise of equality and freedom for all were the fundamentals of new conceptions of individual rights. However, women, as well as racial minorities (blacks suffered more than any other race) were excluded from the debate which paradoxically promised equality and freedom for all.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation and the Politics of Reproductive biology," Joan W. Scott, "A Woman who has only paradoxes to offer...", Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Joan Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex*, Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution*.

¹⁶ Although this study of women's exclusion from the public sphere will not look into race as an excluding factor, it was nonetheless a component of this exclusion. The economic revolution of

In *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Culture*, Dorinda Outram argues that the exclusion of women helped the revolutionary governing class to legitimize its struggle for power. Women were often blamed for the corruption of the Old Order. The Countess Du Barry during the last years of Louis XV's reign, Madame de Lamotte-Valois and the affair of the Queen's necklace, Mme de Lamballe, as well as Marie-Antoinette herself, are a few examples of women whose involvement in political life cast a shadow over women's agency in the public sphere. Outram also argues that "Boudoir politics, the exchange of political gifts for sexual favors, were seen both as a cause of the weaknesses of the old regime, and as a justification for the Revolution itself."¹⁷ More than ever before, sexuality and politics were tightly linked. Some highly motivated women did not hesitate to combine their intelligence with their physical beauty and used carnal charms to reach or impact the public sphere, as was illustrated for instance in Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). The strong connection between politics and sexuality made it easier for the patriarchy to

the eighteenth century, partly based on the developing mercantilism with the colonies and the slave trade, fueled fascination for the "sauvages". The slave trade was an important factor in the booming economy and certain cities such as Nantes relied heavily on the "triangle d'or". Boats would leave from Nantes for the Western coast of Africa where they were loaded with slaves who would work in sugar plantations in the Caribbean. The boats would finally sail back to Nantes with products from Guadeloupe or Martinique. Some - like Montesquieu in *De l'esclavage* - questioned slavery and spoke against it. Yet, the fundamental paradox between the egalitarian discourse promising freedom to all on one hand, and slavery and the treatment endured by Africans on the other, did not strike the majority of the eighteenth-century society, at least until the 1780s. In her 1785 controversial play *De l'esclavage des noirs*, which she had difficulty getting it staged, Olympe de Gouges reveals the aberration of such a discourse and takes an abolitionist stand.

¹⁷ Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Culture*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 125.

blame women, first for the decline of the Old Order and later for the struggles in implementing the New Regime. Accused of sexual perversion and an incestuous relationship with her son, Marie-Antoinette was charged during her trial with both political and sexual crimes.¹⁸ These alleged crimes highlighted for ordinary people her political crimes, and – despite the famous reaction of women responding favorably to the Queen’s appeal – they became central to her condemnation.¹⁹ Thus she was she considered guilty of having corrupted not only the body politic but also the physical body of her son, the Dauphin, who, as heir to the throne, was the continuation of the body politic.

In its attempt to distinguish itself from the corrupt Old Order, the emerging governing class adopted an anti-feminine rhetoric that justified the creation of a political establishment reserved for men only (Outram 125). This process happened at a time when the number of women who were more visible politically was increasing, especially in Paris. In *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Joan Landes argues that women’s societal role,

¹⁸ In the indictment of the Queen established on the 15th of October 1793 by Fouquier Tinville, the *Public Accusor*, we read among the charges the following: “Qu’enfin la veuve Capet, immorale sous tous les rapports, et nouvelle Agrippine, est si perverse et si familière avec tous les crimes, qu’oubliant sa qualité de mère, et la démarcation prescrite par les lois de la nature, elle n’a pas craint de se livrer avec Louis-Charles Capet son fils, et de l’aveu de ce dernier, à des indecencies dont l’idée et le nom seuls font frémir d’horreur.” The “Lecture de l’acte d’accusation” can be found in *Marie-Antoinette: les derniers jours d’une reine*, available at http://pagesperso.aol.fr/_ht_a/marieanthoinet/HTML/les%20derniers%20jours.htm

¹⁹ To respond to this unsustainable accusation, the Queen turned to the women present in the audience and appealed to their motherly love to determine whether a loving and devoted mother could commit such crime. Women then sided with the Queen voicing their disapproval to the judges for unfairly accusing a mother.

which they enjoyed in the sphere of public discussion thanks to prominent eighteenth-century salonnières, was clearly diminished by the Revolution. It set them back and failed to award them the new political rights of citizens who, by definition, were male.

On the other hand, in her book *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, Carla Hesse shows, through a statistical and thematic analysis of women authors, that the number of women whose works were in print constantly increased. She identifies 55 women with works in print in France between 1766 and 1777, and 78 women between 1777 and 1788. She then records a fourfold increase from 1789 and 1800, when 329 women were in print (p.37). While Joan Landes sees in the Revolution a reduction of women's participation in the intellectual field, Hesse, on the other hand, shows that the Revolution reduced controls and censorship, and thus helped open the competitive market for published works to more authors. In *La France révolutionnaire*, André Monglond lists and describes all the publications during the revolutionary period.²⁰ Although women's publications seem lost in the quantity of works published during this period and texts written by women have since then been unearthed and recovered by scholars, Monglond's *France révolutionnaire* still remains the most complete catalog of works published during the revolutionary

²⁰ André Monglond, *La France révolutionnaire et impériale: annales de bibliographie méthodique et description des livres illustres*, 10 vols. Grenoble: Editions B. Arthaud, 1930-1978.

era. It also provides an important insights into the written discourse of women during this period.

Whatever position one might take on the role of the Revolution in changing women's place in the public sphere, one is forced to admit that the number of women nevertheless rose constantly during the decades preceding the Revolution. This visibility became problematic for those who believed in the sanctity of universal rights but not in their universality.²¹

The status of women was once again, along with the paradox in the conception of universality of freedom and equality, more strongly than ever before brought to light by feminists such as Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Constance de Salm, and Etta Palms d'Aelders, who challenged liberal notions of the autonomous individual. Why were women not considered full "citizens"?²² Olympe de Gouges asserts that women were "born equal to men" and therefore should have the same rights as men particularly in three domains from which they were excluded: education, employment, and political participation. (*Ecrits politiques, 1792-93*, 99-112). However, until the Revolution, a woman was legally considered subject to her father's authority, then to her

²¹ See Appelwhite, Levy and Johnson on the increasing numbers of politically visible women during the Revolution.

²² On the question of women as citizens, see Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, UP of Toronto, 1992, and also Dale L. Clifford, "Can the Uniform Make the Citizen?" in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34.3 (2001): 363-82.

husband's authority in every aspect. The distinction of rights for both sexes was clearly marked in the legal discourse.

B. Patriarchy and the Law.

The legal discourse in the second half of the eighteenth century regarding woman's status, rights, and duties had not changed since Louis XIV. In the decade before the French Revolution, the law in force known to us thanks to the work of Jean Domat (1625-1696) was still the one in use a century earlier.²³ Domat's work remains untouched by most scholars, although his treatise was one of the most important, if not the most important of its kind under the Old Order, before the Revolution. In *Les Lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel*, first published in 1689,²⁴ Domat gives a general explanation of social distinctions: "les distinctions qui sont l'état des personnes, par la nature, sont fondées sur le sexe, la naissance, & sur l'âge de chaque personne" (Domat, I, section 1, p. 10). The hierarchic system on which society was based and which was institutionalized by law was grounded on three major principles that allegedly found their justification in nature: sex, birth, and age. While age was mainly considered in

²³ Jean Domat (1625-1696), friend of the philosopher Pascal, was the first juriconsult to clarify the civil law and later the public law of his time, as well as the Roman law on which they were based. His *Traité des lois* was published by the Crown in 1689. This text is available in Joseph Remy, ed., *Traité des lois*, Paris: Firmin, 1828 and more recently in Jean Domat, *Traité des lois*, Centre de philosophie juridique de l'Université de Caen, 1994.

²⁴ Although the first edition of *Les Lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel* dated from 1689, just a century before the beginning of the French Revolution, I used a later edition: Jean Domat, *Les Lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel : le droit public et Legum delectus*, Paris: Sauqrain Père, 1745. All references

regards to respect among people, birth partly justified the distinction of classes between the Third Estate and the nobility and even within each of the social strata. Distinctions between the sexes were a cornerstone on which the patriarchal system was founded. The limitation of women's rights and their exclusion from the public sphere resided in the seemingly self-explanatory "la seule raison du sexe":

Le sexe qui distingue l'homme & la femme, fait entr'eux cette difference, pour ce qui regarde leur état, que les hommes sont capables de toute sorte d'engagemens & fonctions, si ce n'est que quelqu'un en soit exclUPar des obstacles particuliers, & que les femmes sont incapables par la seule raison du sexe de plusieurs sortes d'engagemens & fonctions. (Domat, I, p.11)

In the explanatory note to this article, Domat uses argumentative rhetoric to justify the patriarchal system, and the oppression of women:

Par notre usage les femmes sont sous la puissance de leurs maris, ce qui est du droit naturel & du droit divin. C'est à cause de cette puissance du mari sur la femme, que par notre usage elle ne peut s'obliger sans l'autorité du mari, sinon en certains cas.

The rupture in the logic within the argument reveals the phalocentric perspective of the legal discourse. The "droit naturel" and the "droit divin" are mentioned as the reasons for which women ought to be under their husbands'

and pages numbers are from the 1745 edition. Domat's work was constantly re-edited and went through twenty-five editions from 1689 to 1777.

authority. The legal discourse however fails to explain why and in what ways the “droit naturel” and the “droit divin” are at the origin of the patriarchal order.

One can find this biased and broken rhetoric in many articles concerning the limitations of woman’s activities and rights. A woman was not allowed to sign as a witness for a person’s will : “(...)la fonction d’un témoignage de cette nature étant plus naturelle aux hommes, on ne doit pas y mêler de femmes” (Domat, I, 399). Two breach in the logic can be pointed out in this article: 1) the cause mentioned (the task being *more natural* to men) does not lead to the given conclusion (women shall not meddle with that task), and 2) the cause mentioned is presented or accepted as a true fact without being questioned or proven.

For the same reasons, women could not become guardians:

Les femmes sont incapables d’être tutrices d’autres que leurs enfans. Car la tutelle demande une autorité, & oblige à des fonctions, qu’il seroit indécent qu’un femme exerçât à l’égard d’autres personnes que de ses enfans. (Domat, I, 160)

The inability or incapacity for women to be guardians is presented as an undeniable fact in a short sentence while the apparent explanation is given in the following sentence. The right to guardianship is denied to women because of the authority and the fulfillment of certain functions that it requires. This article, however, fails to provide what should be the true reason for not being able to fulfill the task of the guardianship, that is, not the authority nor the functions but the inability to fulfill them. Decency is mentioned, but decency only provides the consequence or in other words the reason why women should not be in charge of

a guardianship. It does not demonstrate the cause leading to the inability of such a function. One wonders however why it would be indecent for women to be invested with the authority and the functions required for such a task, if it is not for depriving men of their power over women. Granting such a simple right to women would lead to admitting that women are as able as men and that authority and power can be exercised regardless of sex. In a word, it would jeopardize the patriarchal system.

Not only were women not allowed to represent themselves in a court of law, but they were also excluded from any judiciary function. Their role was limited to that of witness:

Les femmes qui à cause du sexe ne peuvent être Juges, ne peuvent être nommées arbitres par un compromis ; quoiqu'elles puissent exercer la fonction de personnes expertes, en ce qui peut être de leur connoissance dans quelque art ou profession qui sont de leur fait. Car cette fonction n'est pas du caractère de celle de Juge.
(Domat, I, 127)

Once again, no other reason but that of their “sex” is given to justify women’s exclusion from the function of judge. What is presented as a natural indisposition to exercise such a profession, is a covert desire by men to prevent women from accessing positions of power, particularly those within the public sphere; allowing a woman to be a judge would enable her to have power over men, thus weakening once more the patriarchal order on which society was

based. Consequently, women could not legally participate in governing bodies. In fact, it was not until 1779 that women were legally permitted to receive a pension or inheritance without marital consent. On the other hand, women engaged in business did enjoy certain freedoms (hiring employees, signing contracts, etc.) that were denied to other women.²⁵

With the exception of disposing of the “biens paraphernaux” (Domat, I, 102), nothing could be done without marital consent: women were not entitled to inheritance or to the use of their dowry without their husband’s consent, even though some laws limited the husbands’ right to dispose of it freely. If some women appeared to enjoy a certain amount of freedom in some regions of France by running a business and committing themselves financially, they owed that right to their husbands:

Ainsi, la femme qui est marchande publique, & qui fait un commerce séparé de celui de son mari, peut s’obliger sans être expressément autorisée. Car c’est par le consentement du mari qu’elle fait ce commerce. (11)

If, in parts of France, certain members of the patriarchal order enabled some women to gain some degree of economic power, it constituted, however, a financial and a cultural risk. Other regions were not willing to take on such a risk, which could eventually jeopardize the entire patriarchal system. To maintain the supremacy of the patriarchal society, the right to allow their wives to participate in commercial endeavors in any way was denied to men:

²⁵ For a brief discussion of laws as they apply to women in the eighteenth century, see Armogathe

C'est encore à cause de cette même puissance du mari, qu'en quelques Provinces les femmes mariées ne peuvent s'obliger, & non pas même avec le consentement & l'autorité du mari, de crainte que l'usage de cette puissance ne tournât à la perte ou à la diminution de leur bien dotal. (11)

Domat's *Les Lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel* echoes many aspects of *Les Lois ecclésiastiques de France dans leur ordre naturel* by Louis de Héricourt published in 1736. One can read in both works similar articles such as those in the section called "Du Mariage." This text, like the aforementioned one, is a representation of the phalologo-centric discourse which aimed to institutionalize male supremacy over women. This can be seen in the fact that many sections are directed only toward women at various stages or aspects of their social life, and not toward men. For example, sections entitled "veuves" or "filles," which can be found in the annexes, do not find their male equivalent ("veufs" or "fils").

The section regarding abduction considers only the kidnapping of a daughter or a girl, while the one concerning adultery is tackled merely from the perspective of a woman committing adultery. The adultery committed by the husband is not studied separately from, but in relation to, the wife's adultery. There is no article regarding the adultery of the husband of a faithful wife. The opening in the annexes, dedicated to "femmes", lists all the situations for which there is a law. Several of these situations, some of which have an anecdotal aspect to them, resemble the plots of medieval "fabliaux": *Femme remariée sur la*

and Albistur, *Histoire du féminisme français* (1977), 174.

foi d'un faux Certificat de mort de son mari, qui revient après, que faut-il faire?, Si une femme peut épouser un homme avec lequel elle a commis une fornication, Si une femme qui se marie pendant la vie de son premier mari est adultere, & si le premier mari étant de retour, elle doit quitter le second.

As in the fabliaux, this discourse shows a certain mistrust regarding female behavior within marriage. Women are depicted as calculating, mischievous, sexual beings who will manipulate men into acting against one another. This can be seen in the fact that women are given the agency of the misdeeds, while men are victimized by the deprivation of any agency and become the designated targets of women's cruel intentions. Even though no one is really fooled by this rhetoric, what nonetheless results is that women commit adultery or fornication and men do not. The legal and ecclesiastic discourses that share many of the regulations regarding adultery do not sanction men and women equally. A woman did not need to be proven guilty of adultery to experience the socially permitted wrath of her husband. If suspected of adultery, she could be sent to a convent upon her husband's request for a period of two years, and her dowry could be confiscated and given to her children.²⁶ Only her husband could accuse her of the crime and release her from the two-year sentence. If the husband were to die within this two-year period, she would not be set free, unless she remarried (article xxxix). On the other hand, the husband

²⁶ If the woman charged with adultery did not have any children, the husband was then the beneficiary of the dowry (*Lois ecclésiastiques*, Article XXXI, 98). It could be used to pay for the pension in the convent.

did not face the same kind of sentence. In most cases, he would merely be deprived of the right to accuse his wife of the same crime and to send her away. However, he would first have to be proven guilty. If proven guilty, his wife would legally be allowed to ask to be separated “de corps & d’habitation” (article XXXVII, 99). Yet, women were usually taught to turn a blind eye to their husband’s extramarital affairs.

The double standards were a clear indication of the phalocentric discourse which aimed to protect the husband’s interests. Adultery was a severe crime because it breached the subordination of a wife to her husband and could introduce a doubt in the legitimacy of the succession. In other words, it was the most severe attack against the patriarchal system. For the same reason, a widow was to avoid remarrying within the first year following her husband’s death. Both legal and ecclesiastic discourses specify that there was no real sanction against the widow who would remarry “follement,” for she was free to enter any arrangement. What could not be forbidden by the institutions, however, could be reprovved morally.

C. Patriarchification of the Body and the Law.

Occasionally grounded in science, the legal discourse sometimes draws different conclusions regarding a woman’s maturity. The legal discourse differs from the scientific discourse, as we will see later, with regard to when, if ever, women reach full maturity. To answer the legal question regarding the age at

which girls can be considered adult (the question concerns girls and not boys), Domat introduces the difference between maturity and the “majorité” using science to establish an allegedly *legitimate* correlation between law (and thus the cultural) and nature. The section in which Domat approaches the question of the “majorité,” or adulthood, specifically targets toward girls. Even though he answers the question for both sexes, the title nonetheless reads “A quel âge les filles sont adultes?” highlighting the gender-based perspective of the legal discourse. While the “majorité,” set at the age of 25 for both sexes, is a culturally-constructed concept (and thus arbitrary), it was established to keep children under the father’s authority (one could say ownership). Adulthood or maturity, on the other hand, results from a physiological factor, that is, puberty:

Les impubères sont les garçons qui n’ont pas encore quatorze ans accomplis, & les filles qui n’en ont pas douze. Et les adultes sont les garçons à quatorze ans accomplis, & les filles à douze” (Domat 14).

Since girls and boys were both subject to their father’s authority at least until the age of twenty-five, Domat’s legal answer to this question would seem harmless had he not tied it to his explanatory notes on the social institution of marriage:

C’est la puberté qui fait cesser l’incapacité du mariage, que fait le défaut d’âge. Mais on distingue de cette puberté qui suffit pour rendre le mariage licite, la pleine puberté, qui le rend plus honnête. Cette puberté pour les mâles est à l’âge de 18 ans accomplis, & pour les filles à 14 ans. (Domat 15).

This note reveals not only the patriarchal perspective already present in the title of the section, but also the patriarchal objective hidden behind such a preconception; that is, to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony through marriage. The cultural institution is tied to human physiology. The distinction is then made between what is legal (the beginning of puberty as a natural and legal component allowing marriage) and what is moral (the end of the puberty). Although boys and girls physiologically became adults around the age of 12 and 14 respectively, it was not culturally acceptable for them to enter the marital institution before reaching “la pleine puberté” at the age of 14 for girls and 18 for boys. The unevenness of the gap, that is the fact that boys could marry two years later than girls after reaching physical maturity, shows that a woman was to enter marriage earlier than a man, thus limiting her role in the patriarchal society to that of a wife. However different the position of the legal and scientific discourse may have been on the “adulthood” of women, both discourses shared the same ultimate aim; that is, the legitimization of women’s imprisonment within the domestic realm.

Some legal attempts were made during the Revolution to improve the status of women, reducing inequalities between the sexes (for instance, equal rights of inheritance were granted to brothers and sisters, and the right to divorce was established).²⁷ These attempts, however, lasted for a short period of

²⁷ See Applewhite, Levy and Johnson, *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-95* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979).

time, and there was still a long way to go in order to reach a true equality of rights and status. Despite these few new rights granted during the Revolution, women could not legally participate in the political sphere, and were proscribed from membership in the National Assembly or even from being represented in it.

Carol Pateman argues that patriarchal rights, that is the right of a man/husband over a woman/wife, were never contested nor abolished by the Revolution and that it was in fact paternal rights that were scrutinized and attacked by the theorists of the social contract (5). In her view, the Revolution replaced the paternalistic authority of the king by a fraternal power. Yet, patriarchy remained in place, and was merely transformed and relegated to the allegedly nonpolitical familial and private realm. Women's entry in the body politic was complicated by the patriarchal discourse which increased focus on the body, and more particularly, on the female body as "different" and as suitable only for the maternal role.

D. Patriarchizing the Body

Women were considered "incapable of entering the original contract and transforming themselves into the civil individuals who uphold its terms, due to their unusual relationship to "nature" through childbirth."²⁸ Similarly, Joan Scott argues that during the French Revolution, the emerging Jacobin social order

²⁸ Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*. (Polity Press, Cambridge and Stanford UP, 1988), 96.

regarded “Nature” as the origin of liberty and of sexual difference.²⁹ “Political” then, was understood as rational, public, and universal, and women were defined as “natural,” and therefore outside of politics (105). Both Pateman and Scott allude to the fact that feminist views made the democratic promise of liberal political theory problematic, if not impossible, in the terms in which it was conceived.

Those who wished to keep women outside the public sphere, and politics in particular, understand the importance of the ideology centered on women’s “nature” seen as “different”, highlighting the “disabling” aspects of the female body (and therefore being). This ideology could only succeed through the elaboration of a scientific, philosophical, and medical discourse, which required the support of theorists in each field. The support of scientists, philosophers, and medical doctors was necessary for its success. Lynn Hunt argues – as does Carla Hesse (although she does not reach the same conclusion) - that the concerns raised about women’s political participation are at the origin of the mobilization of medical opinion at the end of the eighteenth century. In *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, Hunt states:

Domestic ideology only emerged in France because political and cultural leaders felt the need to justify in some systematic way the

²⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, “French Feminists and the Right of ‘Man’: Olympe de Gouges’s Declarations”, *History Workshop* 28 (1989), 1-21.

continuing exclusion of women from politics, even while they were admitted to many legal rights of civil society.³⁰

Thus, the domestic ideology was not the cause of the exclusion of women from the public sphere, but rather was the result of men's will to reinforce the exclusion of women from the political sphere.

Thomas Laqueur also argues for a connection between politics and the re-interpretation of the female body in relation to that of the male in the late eighteenth century.³¹ According to Laqueur, the number of studies on women's biological distinctiveness increased around that time. New views and a new nomenclature replaced traditional views on female anatomy. Women had long been considered imperfect versions of men; the female body was seen as an aberration of the male's: her genitals were seen as inversions of the male's. Physiologists, such as Pierre Roussel, rejected this theory and viewed ovaries, which had previously been defined as "female testicles," as "the receptacles of ova or female seed."³² Unlike his fellow physicians who endorsed the new discoveries on ovaries, Roussel rejected the importance given to the egg/ovule/ovum because it led to the absurd conclusion, he maintained, that women played a dominant role in the reproductive process. He claimed that his contemporaries emphasized too hastily the significance of the egg in producing

³⁰ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

³¹ Thomas Laqueur, "Organism, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," in *Representations* 14 (1986): 3-23.

the next generation. The old hierarchy between men and women established according to their degree of metaphysical perfection (their vital heat) was widely accepted in the sixteenth century.³³ This gave way to an anatomy and physiology of “incommensurability,” to use Laqueur’s terminology, in which the relationship of men to women was not defined through criteria of superiority and inferiority, but was rather one of *difference*. Laqueur argues that “no one was interested in looking at anatomical and concrete physiological differences between the sexes until such difference became politically important” (3). Knowledge of biology was used to justify cultural and political differences between men and women. Such differences were essential to the articulation of both feminist and antifeminist arguments (17).

During the Enlightenment scientists occupied a prominent place in society. Science grew in importance and was to bring, not only answers, as religion had done until then, but also progress. After the religious discourse had established the inferiority of women on a theological basis, scientists not only proposed new answers to the debate, but also provided new questions, such as whether women were capable of abstract thought or whether they should or even could be educated. Londa Schiebinger points out that the eighteenth-century revolution in views about sexuality went beyond the study of the

³² Laqueur cites the London Medical Dictionary of 1819.

³³ See Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1975).

reproductive organs. She argues that the reevaluation of women's reproductive organs was just one element among others. Yet it brought many new questions to the attention of the scientific community, for example whether there were other significant physiological differences between men and women besides reproductive organs.³⁴

Before the eighteenth century only the male skeleton had been studied because it was forbidden to dissect female corpses. Knowledge of female anatomy was therefore limited when compared to that of the male. It was only in the eighteenth century that the first female skeleton was studied in detail and compared to the male skeleton in order to establish the differences. In the many sketches of female and male skeletons, the two sites of the political debates emerged: the skull as a mark of intelligence and the pelvis as a measure of womanliness. As far as the size of the skull was concerned, the European male was thought to be representative of a fully grown human type, while the European female, along with the African (regardless of the sex), belonged to the inferior, underdeveloped type, making them intellectually inadequate (212). Schiebinger concludes that scientists considering the human body, such as anatomists, anthropologists, natural historians, who were working under the

³⁴ The focus of Schiebinger's studies is the body as it relates to both race and gender in the eighteenth century. See Londa Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the 19th Century*. Ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur. (Berkeley: U. of California P, 1987), and *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), and also *The Mind Has No Sex; Women in the Origins of Modern Science*. (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1989).

banner of the alleged scientific neutrality, declared that, by nature, people with compressed crania (which included women of any race as well as black-skinned males) were unable to pursue academic science (*Nature's Body*). This belief was to last throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

In 1726 Monro's studies indicated that, because of a larger and stronger pelvic area, the woman's frame was suitable for procreative functions (Schiebinger, *The Mind*, 193). The focus on the size of the pelvis served to highlight woman's role as mother and ground it in nature. In addition, women's weaker bone structure and rounder, smoother external features were compared to those of children. This closer resemblance to children presumably resulted from the fact that a woman, unlike man, stops growing around the age of fourteen. A woman was therefore considered biologically as never having reached full maturity (209).

E. Roussel on the Female Body, leading to medicine.

1. Roussel's proto-psychological approach.

In 1775 Roussel published a treatise, *Système physique et moral de la femme*, reedited in 1803 and 1805, at a time when the position of women within the private sphere was reinforced and codified by the Napoleon's *Code Civil*.³⁵ Acknowledging Descartes and Montesquieu's legacy, Roussel positions his work

³⁵ Rober Roussel, *Système politique et moral de la femme, ou Tableau philosophique de la constitution, de l'état organique, du tempérament, des mœurs et des fonctions propres au sexe*. (Paris: Chez Vincent, 1775).

between both philosophers.³⁶ Nonetheless, he criticizes many of his predecessors and contemporaries for having failed to present adequate discussions on sexual differences. For Roussel, the essence of sexual difference extended far beyond the matter of pure physical nature:

La différence de ces moyens constitue le sexe, dont l'essence ne se borne point à un seul organe, mais s'étend, par des nuances plus ou moins sensibles à toutes les parties ; de sorte que la femme n'est pas seulement à un endroit, mais encore par toutes les faces par lesquelles elle peut être envisagée. (2)

In this passage, it is the male gaze that sees the essence of female sex generalized in every aspect of woman. Roussel sought to reach a holistic definition of human nature, and that of woman in particular, by connecting the physical and the moral to one another instead of studying each separately. He used the theory of "temperaments" to argue that psychological traits explained physiological phenomena. In this aspect, he opposes Rousseau and many others for whom physiology explained a woman's behavior. In his studies, which can be qualified as proto-psychoanalytical, Roussel focused specifically on the nature of women and on the differences between the sexes. He claims that organs and humors account for the various character types (sanguine, phlegmatic, bilious, melancholic) as well as for individual capacities for thinking and feeling. Women

³⁶ Roussel explains that Descartes's legacy was to integrate human bodies into the mechanical operations of the universe, therefore providing medicine with a mechanical essentialist approach.

and men - because their constitutions differ - respond differently to sense impressions and to mental operations.

Unlike women, men were able to comprehend vast, universal principles and were capable of abstract thought, precisely because, according to Russel, sensations and movements were not marked in the region of the head. On the other hand, the frailty of women's organs made their "sensibility" both stronger and more diffuse than men's, rendering them more capable of "feeling" than "creating." Germaine de Staël later devoted a large part of her life, her energy, and her writing fighting such conceptions. Without drawing hasty conclusions, one ought however to take note that the publication of *Corinne* coincides with the re-edition of Roussel's work. Roussel argued that women were unable to grasp political, philosophical concepts and intellectual ideas because their imagination was too "mobile." For him, women's knowledge did not result from a cognitive process but from impressions. Unfortunately, impressions are not a constant:

Leurs opinions tiennent peut-être moins aux opérations de l'esprit, qu'à l'impression qu'ont faite sur elles ceux qui les leur ont suggérées; & quand elles cèdent, c'est moins aux traits victorieux du raisonnement, qu'à une nouvelle impression qui vient détruire la première. (48)

Although the "tyranny" of sensations made women unable to aspire to noble conceptions, binding them to the ordinary world, their active imagination

Montesquieu, because of his interest in particular causes over general principles, was able to "pénétrer les sombres détours du Coeur humain" (3).

and “extrême sensibilité” gave them a more acute appreciation of “honneur,” and the natural desire to “élever l’âme” (43-44). Unlike men, who might be (or pretend to be) virtuous for the sake of material gain, women are virtuous by nature. Thus, the combination of weaker organs and more active sensibility in women limit their intellectual capacities while simultaneously widening their scope for virtuous behavior. Women’s intrinsic goodness was considered incongruous with the business of learning; at the same time, it is what supposedly enables them to temper the harsh nature of men:

(...) les femmes, dont l’affabilité & le caractère conciliant, qui leur ont été donnés pour tempérer la rudesse naturelle de l’homme, ne sçauroient s’accorder avec la morgue du sçavoir. (106)

Roussel, in describing women’s psychological behaviors, linked what he considered feminine characteristics (i.e. passivity, timidity, inconstancy, intuition and intellectual weakness...) to the physiological nature of women. Roussel tied women’s physiology to their habits. Normality consisted of a “sanguine temperament,” whose manifestations were rosy cheeks, gaiety, light-mindedness, and capriciousness. A “sanguine” personality reflected a unity and harmony between the physical constitution and moral inclinations. Such views, linking women’s moral character to physiological phenomena, restricted female honor and happiness to the domestic realm. The “ideal” woman, already confined and immobilized by Rousseau’s notions, was also inscribed in medical discourse.

In spite of the differences, Roussel's explanations of sexual difference nonetheless added credibility to Rousseau's philosophical arguments about gender differences and the domestic ideology.

Although Roussel disagreed with many physicians for whom behavior resulted from physiological causes, he was not alone in the medical circle in using previous biological discoveries on women's physiology to conclude that woman's natural place was in the private realm of the home. Robert A. Nye claims that:

between 1770 and 1830, biologists and doctors were engaged in a kind of bio-ethnography, compiling lists of male and female attributes, identifying (...) sexually differentiated pathologies, (...)speculating about male and female contributions to procreation.³⁷

Because it provided evidence based on scientific observations, the medical discourse justified - more than the literary discourse - the containment of women in the domestic sphere. It grounded Rousseau's domestic discourse in science.

In the decade preceding the Revolution, physicians concerned with issues of reproduction published several treatises on conjugal hygiene, focusing on woman's body. Lelarge de Lignac's *De l'homme et de la femme considérés physiquement dans l'état de mariage* (1772) and Jean-André Venel's *Essai sur la santé et l'éducation medicinale des filles destinées au mariage* (1776) provided

³⁷ Robert A. Nye, "Biology, Sexuality, and Morality in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.2 (2002), 236.

explanations for the alleged deterioration of physical features visible among the population and means to face the decreasing and *degenerating* demography. Lignac was in favor of regulating sexual behavior: he considered marriage independently of its religious implications and more as a societal institution in which human relations ought to be regulated. Marriage had one function only: reproduction. Lignac considered abnormal and aberrant anyone, regardless of their sex, who did not fulfill his or her procreative duties. In *Medicine, Marriage, and Human Degeneration in the French Enlightenment*, Winston states that:

For Lignac, any behavior that detracts from normative conjugal relations is to be condemned as a crime against society. In his hands, the conjugal hygiene treatise becomes an instrument of social reform: by reforming the institution according to a procreative ideal, the state could be resurrected.³⁸

The importance of motherhood defining women's civil duty was to become crucial during the Revolution.

2. Medicine in the shaping of a Nation: Robert's *Mégalanthropogénésie*

By the end of the Revolution, some members of the scientific medical community had developed a eugenic discourse that emphasized the importance of women's role. Louis-Joseph-Marie Robert took a more extreme standpoint by

³⁸ Michael Winston, "Medicine, Marriage, and Human Degeneration in the French Enlightenment," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.2 (2005), 270.

placing the entire responsibility of the degeneration of the French citizen on women. In 1801 Robert published his *Essai sur la mégalanthropogénésie, ou l'Art de faire des enfants d'esprit qui deviennent des grands hommes*. The pretentious title does not hide his misogynistic intentions: a eugenic program from which only the male of the nation would benefit. Megalanthropogenesis is not so much to be understood as mega- anthropos - genesis as it is mega-androgenesis, for in Greek anthropos normally defines men as the human race and aner/andros characterizes the male gender. It is then, as clearly stated throughout the treatise, the creation (genesis) of a superior male/mankind.

Winston has synthesized Robert's understanding of women: "Following Buffon, he (Robert) claims 'degeneration always passes through the female of the species'" (274). For Robert, not only is women intrinsically inferior but she is also the cause of the degeneration. He re-appropriates the eighteenth-century discourse. Women who had previously been considered the cause of men's degeneration (whether it be termed denaturalization or effeminization) were unworlly attributed with the intentionality of the action for which they were condemned. The intentionality constituted the evil-doing aspect of their nature reflects a moral condemnation of women's participation beyond their domestic functions.³⁹

³⁹ Here, nature is understood as what they had become within society and not as the idealized original, biological, theological characteristics that define them without the societal changes they experimented.

By depriving women of the intentionality of degeneration, while still designating them as the cause of the degeneration of the male's greatness, Robert creates an even more negative image of women than the one traditionally conveyed by the patriarchal ideology of the Ancien Régime. Robert, unlike the literary discourse of the Enlightenment, condescendingly deprives them of the necessary intellect to elaborate and comprehend their participation in the denaturation of men's nature. Yet, he clearly establishes their responsibility in the degenerative process while maintaining the moral condemnation which lays upon their sex.

Greatness (that is male greatness) which is not acquired by the biological process of birth can also be achieved through appropriate education. The second part of his treatise is devoted to the education of citizens. According to Robert, if women ought to have access to some form of education, it is mostly to become better mothers. Since degeneration passes through women, one ought to improve their nature. Education of women is a means to counteract what women are lacking to become a suitable "womb" and provide their husband with a worthy offspring. Education of women is no longer viewed as a way to please a husband, as it was with Rousseau. It becomes a means to strengthen a woman's subordination to the patriarchal ideology, for it objectifies women even more, reducing them to the womb and subordinating them not only to their husband but also to the nation.

F. Woman and Man: Biology and Sociology in Selected Authors.

The movement towards an emphasis on the biological and “natural” rather than the social distinctions between men and women, was also present in many literary and philosophical writings. The question whether inequalities between the sexes were biologically (therefore “natural”) or socially determined became central to many philosophers before the French Revolution, such as Montesquieu, Diderot and Laclos. Since I am not attempting a history of attitudes toward women during the eighteenth century, I will briefly highlight specific aspects of this discourse in their writings.

1. Rousseau’s domestic discourse and the place of women.

In *Emile, ou l’éducation* (1762), Rousseau sets out his view on education. The narrator, who is Emile’s tutor, discusses in great detail how the young pupil should be brought up from birth to adulthood. Rousseau’s semi-fictional treatise is not an account of a gender-neutral education. Indeed, when the hero reaches adulthood, he is introduced to the main female character, Sophie, as a representative of womanhood. Due to her nature, her education differs greatly from Emile’s. In Book five of *Emile*, Rousseau sets forth his argument that woman’s aptitudes, behavior, sensibility, and the nature of her being is caused by her sexuality, or her “femaleness.” In his comparison of Sophie and Emile, he states:

Sophie doit être femme comme Emile est homme; c'est-à-dire, avoir tout ce qui convient à la constitution de son espèce et de son sexe pour remplir sa place dans l'ordre physique et moral. (692)

Because he believed that in everything connected with sex, women and men were in every respect related, but in every respect *different*, Rousseau rejected the possibility of equality between the sexes: "Le male n'est male qu'en certains instans, la femelle est femelle toute sa vie ou du moins toute sa jeunesse; tout la rappelle sans cesse à son sexe." (697)

For Rousseau, "everything" had to do with reproductive biology: child-bearing, nurturing, breast-feeding, and so on. He criticized Plato for "making women into men" by giving them the same labor as men. This was an intolerable abuse, since women, linked as they were to their role in reproducing the species, were completely different from men (699-700). Rousseau states that a perfect man and a perfect woman should not resemble one another, for one sex was "actif" and "fort" while the other one was "passif" and "faible." From this principle, he concludes that "la femme est faite pour plaire et pour être subjuguée." (693) The use of the passive voice in the sentence defining women deprives them of any agency and provides a perfect example of the phalo-logocentric discourse. The education of women must, therefore, be relative to men:

Leur plaire, leur être utiles, se faire aimer et honorer d'eux, les élever jeunes, les soigner grands, les conseiller, les consoler, leur rendre la vie

agréable et douce, voilà les devoirs des femmes dans tous les tems, et ce qu'on doit leur apprendre dès leur enfance. (703)

Whereas Laclos suggested that women might attempt to gain freedom through a revolution, Rousseau claims that, while boys should be taught to revolt against injustice, girls, on the other hand, must tolerate it. "La femme est faite pour céder à l'homme et pour supporter même son injustice; vous ne réduirez jamais les jeunes garçons au même point" (750). Women should not be raised to think of themselves as naturally "strong." He encourages mothers to comply with the laws of nature by not molding their daughters into "honnêtes gens," creating defeminized, unnatural women (701). Rousseau argues that learned women threaten society. Consequently their education must be limited, and he warns against educating women through the study of philosophy. He claims that "rendre [la femme] notre égale (...), qu'est-ce autre chose que transporter à la femme la primauté que la nature donne à son mari?" (731). It follows that girls must be subjected to constant discipline:

Justifiez toujours les soins que vous imposez aux jeunes filles, mais imposez-leur-en toujours. ... Les filles doivent être vigilantes et laborieuses ; ce n'est pas tout ; elles doivent être gênées de bonne heure. ...il faut les exercer d'abord à la contrainte, afin qu'elle ne leur coûte jamais rien, à dompter toutes leurs fantaisies pour les soumettre aux volontés d'autrui. (709)

The young girl was to learn to obey the husband or father, without ever developing her own judgment. Thus, a girl's education should include all that is necessary "pour plaître," while boys must learn all that is necessary "pour savoir." Rousseau suggests that young women should learn to cultivate their "pudeur naturelle." They should encourage men in their intellectual pursuits and apply what they have discovered: "C'est aux femmes à trouver... la morale expérimentale, à nous à la réduire en système" (737). In the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau claimed that women were simply incapable of genius and had no aptitude for art and science (138).

Since women's natural abilities were determined by their physiologically imperative vocation, that of reproducing, and raising families, it was not within their nature to participate in the public sphere. Rousseau makes this clear in his praise of the Greeks, who sequestered women:

Sitôt que ces jeunes personnes étoient mariées, on ne les voyait plus en public; renfermées dans leurs maisons, elles bernoient tous leurs soins à leur ménage et à leur famille. Telle est la manière de vivre que la nature et la raison prescrit au sexe. (*Emile* 705).

According to Rousseau, not only the sequestering and subjugation of women was part of nature's design, it also became a moral necessity, because women's charms could manipulate and corrupt men. He warns men against women's seductive power, for they might distract men from their work in the

public sphere or “usurp the male’s natural right to command.”⁴⁰ Rousseau also indicates that women should limit their influence to the private sphere. Jean Elstain indicates that, for the patriarchy in general and Rousseau in particular, women who overstep the boundaries of their moral power threaten the structure of polity which could result in its collapse: “the legislative hallways would grow silent and empty, or become noisily corrupt.”⁴¹

Like Montesquieu, Rousseau feared women for their potential power, derived from their “beauty”:

Avec la facilité qu’ont les femmes d’émouvoir les sens des homes et d’aller réveiller au fond de leurs coeurs les restes d’un temperament presque éteint, s’il étoit quelque malheureux climat sur la terre où la philosophie eût introduit cet usage, surtout dans les pays chauds où il naît plus de femmes que d’hommes, tyrannisés par elles ils seroient enfin leurs victimes, et se verroient tous traîner à la mort sans qu’ils pussent jamais s’en deffendre. (694)

The power of women over men is a destructive force which awakens men’s libido/passion and deprives them of the control over their existence and thus has to be restrained. For this reason Rousseau argued in favor of separating boys and girls and advised that they should not see each other except on rare specific occasions. Men who spend too much time in the company of women are

⁴⁰ Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 124.

⁴¹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 165.

at risk of being subjected to or dominated by women's charms. They are then at risk of being deprived of their masculinity by the sedentary, frivolous quality of female life. In the *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758), Rousseau expresses his fear of the negative influence of women on men: nothing less than men's feminization, which, according to him, goes against nature, and is therefore aberrant. This, then, justifies the separation of men and women:

(...) ce sexe plus foible, hors d'état de prendre notre manière de vivre trop pénible pour lui, nous force de prendre la sienne trop molle pour nous; et ne voulant plus souffrir de separation, faute de pouvoir se rendre hommes, les femmes nous rendent femmes.⁴²

A similar fear can also be found in Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (1755):

En devenant sociable et Esclave, il devient faible, craintif, rampant, et sa manière de vivre molle et efféminée achève d'énerver à la fois sa force et son courage. (139)

Thus, the segregation of the sexes in society was a necessity of nature and a social imperative. Men, in order to pursue public affairs with dignity, should limit their relations with women to family. Such relations with women were secondary to more important masculine friendships.

In spite of seeing women as intellectually inferior and thus rightly subjected to men, Rousseau puts women, precisely because of their biological disposition and the role of motherhood, on a higher spiritual plane, allowing

⁴² Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Lettres à M. d'Alembert* (Ed. M. Fuchs. Lille, Giard. Geneve, Drow, 1948), 135.

them greater aptitude than men in the realm of virtue. He defines a woman's "natural" virtue in the following way:

Son empire commence avec ses vertus; à peine ses attraits se développent qu'elle règne déjà par la douceur de son caractère et rend sa modestie imposante. (741)

If men's strength and active nature made them more inclined to develop a complex system of abstract thought, and better equipped them to run the affairs of state, then women's natural weakness and tendency towards passivity gave them greater access to the realm of feeling and sensitivity, and made them more capable of managing the private affairs of the heart. Consequently, the same innate biological differences that determined the division of labor between the sexes and closed the public sphere to women, established female superiority in the realm of virtue and goodness, allowing them to reign over the domestic sanctuary. Joan Landes argues that women were not included in the public sphere. However Rousseau gives women a sense of dignity by emphasizing the moral power that women hold within the home.⁴³ Gita May argues that, for Rousseau, despite their natural inferiority, women could reach a greater level of influence and moral ascendancy over their family:

If nature did not destine them to be the intellectual equals of men, it conferred upon them the more precious privilege of exerting a moral ascendancy over the family by their innate aptitude for love

⁴³ Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 67.

and unselfish devotion. Thus, their sphere of influence would be far greater than if they attempted to compete with men...⁴⁴

This gave women a false sense of power within a sphere that held no danger for the male, who remained in charge legally and otherwise. In *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, Mary Trouille argues that this false sense of power partly explains the success of Rousseau's domestic theory among women.

The idea that a woman's physiology determined her psychological functions and abilities became the central argument of domestic ideology, developed to a great extent by Rousseau, and sanctioned by Pierre Roussel. Although essential in the developing of domestic ideology, Rousseau's theory was not exceptional in the sense that many other authors asserted the necessity of preventing women from entering the public sphere due to their physiological nature.

2. Diderot

Diderot was similarly interested in the question of whether or not a woman's nature was biologically or socially determined. Diderot is critical of abuses committed toward women by society. Yet, as we shall see in chapter 3, in juxtaposing Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* and de Gouges's play, *Les Voeux forcés*, Diderot does not argue for equality between the sexes nor for the abolition of the patriarchal system.

⁴⁴ Gita May, "Rousseau's 'Anti-Feminism' Reconstructed," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), 311.

He adopts a negative essentialist discourse and admits an essentialist difference between both sexes: “No less than Freud, Diderot saw women as dominated by their biology and thus radically (...) different from men in their wild affectivity and unreason.”⁴⁵ He distinguishes between woman (emotional, dominated by her emotions, irrational, emphasizing the importance of the body) and man seen as the complete opposite (following reason, dominating his emotions).

In an article entitled “Sur les Femmes,” Diderot enters a controversial debate that began when, in 1772, Thomas published his *Essai sur le caractère, les mœurs, et l'esprit des femmes dans différents siècles* (1772).⁴⁶ Diderot pities women for the way they have been unfairly treated by social institutions.⁴⁷ Diderot ascribes women’s inferiority and her pitiful social destiny not so much to culturally-imposed gender biases as to the physiological organization of her body, to her biological vocation. It is the cruelty of “nature” that destines women for child-bearing, resulting in the debilitation of their health and the loss of their

⁴⁵ Madelyn Gutwirth, “Civil Rights and the Wrongs of Women”, in Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, 1994. P.562.

⁴⁶ In this essay, which was first read before the Académie française in 1770, Antoine Louis Thomas attempted to define “women,” entering into the debate about whether women’s nature was culturally or naturally determined. Despite many contradictions in his arguments, Thomas claims that women were incapable of abstract thought because of their physiology (more specifically their organs). Thomas’s essay as well as Diderot’s and d’Epinay’s response have been reproduced in *Qu’est-ce qu’une femme?* with an introduction by Elizabeth Badinter).

⁴⁷ In this essay, Diderot argues that the education women receive is haphazard at best, that, having no choice in marriage, they are subject to parental and then marital despotism as has been shown in Domat’s *Lois civiles*. He also shows that they must endure the pains of childbirth and risk death to do so, and that finally, with old age, they lose their charms, which in turn causes them to be abandoned by their companion.

charms. It is also “nature” which brings on the “maladie” of menopause, which destroys a woman’s beauty, abandoning her to old age and disfigurement, and thereby renders her powerless. Finally, the body, or more precisely the uterus, is the driving force behind the women’s fluctuating feelings and passions, which constantly oscillate between innocent naiveté and sly malevolence, causing a “hysteria” to which men are not subject. Diderot states:

C’est dans le délire hystérique qu’elle revient sur le passé, qu’elle s’élançait dans l’avenir, que tous les temps lui sont présents. C’est de l’organe propre à son sexe que partent toutes ses idées extraordinaires. (170-71)

Like Pierre Roussel, Diderot believed, at least in this essay, that women’s reproductive organs were ultimately responsible for their physiological character and for their uncontrollable behavior. Because of women’s inability to restrain their passions, they were ambiguous creatures, both angelic and demonic, bordering on the irrational. The female mind, its sensitivity, its machinations, are to be understood on the basis of the “matrice” (the womb). The newly developing notions of domestic ideology reside in the idea that physical nature controls women’s psychological being.

In a private letter to the abbé Galiani, Mme d’Epinay responded to the debate started by A. L. Thomas with a critique of such notions concerning women’s organs and behavior. She argued that women and men were of the same nature and constitution, and this could be seen in primitive communities,

where “les femmes sauvages” are as “robustes” and “agiles” as “les hommes sauvages.” She concludes:

(...) ainsi la faiblesse de notre constitution et de nos organes appartient certainement à notre éducation, et est une suite de la condition qu’on nous a assignée dans la société. (« Lettre » 193)

Her response, unlike Diderot’s article, which became well known in the Salons, remained unknown to the public of the time (Badinter 11).

3. Other Selected Authors.

a. Montesquieu

Influenced by Poulain de la Barre (1647-1723), Montesquieu explains in *Les Lettres persanes* (1721) that the inequality between the sexes results from societal bias, and is not grounded in nature.⁴⁸ At the beginning of *Lettres persanes*, Montesquieu adopts a feminist stand. In a letter by Rica, the main male character, writes: “C’est une grande question, parmi les hommes, de savoir s’il est plus avantageux d’ôter aux femmes la liberté que de la leur laisser (...). C’est une autre question de savoir si la Loi naturelle soumet les femmes aux hommes” (74). Montesquieu provides the following answer to the homocentric debate (“parmi

⁴⁸ For the influence of Poulain de la Barre on Montesquieu’s thought, see Albistur, Maité and Daniel Armogathe, eds., *Histoire du féminisme français* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1977), 109. François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1723) was the champion of woman’s cause in the seventeenth century. A feminist, he wrote several essays, including *De l’égalité des deux sexes* in which he argued that women were equal to men in all aspects and should receive the same rights. For the importance of Poulain de la Barre in the development of the philosophical, social and political thought

les hommes,” my emphasis): “La nature n’a jamais dicté une telle loi. L’empire que nous avons sur elles est une véritable tyrannie; (...) Nous employons toutes sortes de moyens pour leur abattre leur courage; les forces seraient égales, si l’éducation l’était aussi” (75).

However, he also states that women are capable of seduction which no man can resist. This irresistible seduction seen as a tyrannical power (“l’empire de la beauté”) over men is grounded in nature. In spite of the fact that Montesquieu emphasizes neither nature nor biological difference as the reason for women’s subordination, the female body is still regarded as a potential threat to man’s hegemony. According to Julia Douthwaite, the women’s challenge to male authority in the *Lettres persanes* merely creates the illusion of liberation:

By stressing the illegitimacy and destructive potential of female action – in the Persian harem and the French court – the author implies that women need to be dominated for the good of society as a whole. The problems in the harem all came about because there was no kin, husband or father there to lead them.⁴⁹

Montesquieu does not by any means embrace an antifeminist stance, yet he echoes the hegemonic discourse: the depiction of women in his novel reinforces the idea that women are - because of their own, true nature- incapable

leading to the Enlightenment, I suggest reading Siep Stuurman, *François Poulain de la Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard UP, 2004) .

⁴⁹ Julia Douthwaite, *Exotic Women: Literary Heroines and Cultural Strategies in Ancien Régime France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 100.

of self-government. They are not to be relied upon to maintain the collective well-being of the state.

b. Coyer and the *Année merveilleuse*.

What differentiated woman from man was a topic often debated, seriously, ironically and satirically. Woman's *nature* long remained an unclear concept, mostly built upon stereotypes. The abbé Coyer (1707-1782) attacked female nature, which he considered to be the source of many evils in society. In *L'Année merveilleuse* (1748) *Bagatelles morales* (1754), Coyer criticized – humorously – women's behavior and harmful influence on men and society.⁵⁰

Gender role attribution plays an important part throughout Coyer's writings. However, unlike many authors, Coyer did not focus only on the issue of women's attempt to cross over their own gender and the threat it represented to men. He also looked into men's relation to their own gender.

Bagatelles morales is in general very critical of society and its time. Coyer adopts a rather pessimistic and sarcastic position when depicting society and morals. With humor and in a burlesque fashion, Coyer criticizes the reversal of gender roles in *L'Année merveilleuse* which announces the most radical metamorphosis of all: "Supportons nos frères, bientôt nous leur ressembleront,

⁵⁰ *L'Année merveilleuse* was later published in *Bagatelles morales* with other texts criticizing society and women such as *Découverte de l'Isle Frivole* (1751) and the *Siècle présent*. It is important to note that the *Bagatelles morales* was not originally conceived as a whole. As the author mentioned in the preface, he put together pieces that had been published separately: "Je rassemble dans un volume des Pièces qui ont déjà paru sur des feuilles volantes" (p. iii), and added to it as he continued to write. The edition used here for the analysis of *L'Année merveilleuse* is the 1754 first edition of *Bagatelles morales*.

nous serons femmes, & par contrecoup, les femmes seront hommes” (33). Throughout the text, Coyer reiterates, in a burlesque yet prophetic tone, the imminent danger that threatens society: “Les hommes seront changés en femmes, & les femmes en hommes” (57). The importance of this text lies in the fact that, despite the tone, humoristic and burlesque as mentioned, it is probably Coyer’s most misogynistic and provocative piece. Despite the fact that the text is a farce, it nonetheless constitutes a synthesis of patriarchal fears of and an attack on women present in a male-centered discourse. Furthermore, it provoked a prompt and strong reaction in Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780): in 1748 she published her *Lettre en réponse à L’Année merveilleuse* in which she directly answered Coyer’s attacks on women using a similar apparently trivial tone.

In order to emphasize the gravity of crossing gender roles, Coyer extrapolates by explaining that confusing gender roles unavoidably leads to radical physiological consequences, that is, sex change. After briefly claiming that the fear of gender role reversal is not a recent matter but a process that can be witnessed throughout time and various cultures, Coyer then shows the concretization of this fear and its extent in modern society: “Ouvrons les yeux, suivons la nature, & nous appercevrons les progrès qu’elle a déjà faits” (59). Coyer ironically presents the transformations in ideas and morals as part of Nature’s master plan as defined by Plato:

Le divin Platon ne se contente pas d’annoncer ce prodige; il en décrit encore les préludes: *La nature, ce sont ses paroles, commencera*

son ouvrage par la partie la plus difficile; avant de changer les corps, elle changera les idées & les inclinations. (59)

Throughout the text, Coyer attacks women who act like men and men like women. However, the attack is more acerbic toward women, who are made responsible for weakening men.

To some extent, Coyer closes the circle. While scientists and intellectuals have tried to explain that men's and women's physiology justified their role and place in society, Coyer tries to explain through humor and irony that their role and place justify in a sense their physiology. Because they have adopted women's behavior, men, whose attributes used to be "Parler peu, penser beaucoup, & dominer" (35), have now a weakened constitution:

(...) la constitution de l'homme s'affoiblit: ses pieds n'ont plus de force; il passe sa vie au lit, dans un fauteuil, ou dans un carosse (...). Avec tant de faiblesse, comment partir pour la guerre? (37-38)

Men have been deprived of their virility understood as both physical and physiological. Lacking their physical strength, they can no longer provide protection, nor can they conquer. Their lack of strength impacts their ability to fulfill their basic reproductive function: "Il y a long-tems que cette faiblesse travaille à dépeupler la terre" (39). Men have lost their phallus, figuratively and literally: not only are they physically weak, they are also becoming impotent.

Women, however, are inherently tied to their physiology. At the end of *L'Année merveilleuse*, Coyer sides with the phalocentric discourse:

Enfans de violence, votre règne est passé ; (...) les femmes ne ceindront pas vos épées car il faut remarquer avec tous les Philosophes, que la nature, malgré l'étendue de son pouvoir, ne peut pas changer les essences. Or, il est évident que l'essence de la femme est la douceur (...) C'est un caractéristique, c'est un immuable: le Sexe, malgré sa transformation, se souviendra toujours, avec complaisance, qu'il fut fait pour multiplier & non pour détruire. (41)

For Coyer, the crossing over genders is limited and becomes secondary inasmuch as the extent of the societal, moral or behavioral changes could not erase the biological function of woman's body.

The importance of *L'Année merveilleuse* precisely lies in the fact that it is not exceptional. On the contrary, it is indeed representative of the traditional discourse about women and of so many other texts by male authors. Abbé Coyer's text, without necessarily focusing on the fair sex, is filled with derogatory remarks toward women.

However, *L'Année merveilleuse* provided Abbé Coyer with an outlet to express his concerns about (or rather anger at) women. In *L'Année merveilleuse*, Abbé Coyer specifically targeted women and their evil influence on men. In the latter Abbé Coyer lays bare his inner thoughts about women but also about gender construction and gender acting. Unlike *L'Ile frivole* which contains sporadic derogatory remarks about women, *L'Année merveilleuse* is inherently an attack on women and their evil influence on weakened men. Like Rousseau, Abbé Coyer shared the common opinion that gender ought to be clearly defined

and that confusion of gender brings nothing but ridicule and the weakening of morals.

The importance of Coyer's *L'Année merveilleuse, ou Les Hommes-femmes* lies in the fact that it is a paradigmatic example of the misogynistic discourse of the period, but it can also be viewed in the polemic it created. Among the rejoinders published almost immediately, Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's *Lettre en réponse à L'Année merveilleuse* constitutes an attack of Coyer's (therefore men's) narrow, sexist conception of woman. As Joan H. Stewart shows in *Gynogrpahs*, "the interest of this polemic for a study of women novelists lies in its articulation of the very conditions of possibility for feminist writing in the late eighteenth century."⁵¹

Le Prince de Beaumont responds to Coyer's attack not by undermining, but rather by emphasizing the existence of inherent differences between men and women. According to Joan H. Stewart, "the discrimination [Le Prince de Beaumont] makes not only sorts out intrinsic physical and metaphysical differences between man and woman but also challenges the basis of [Coyer's] hierarchy."⁵² Whereas Coyer and the patriarchy sees these differences as elements of men's superiority over women, Le Prince de Beaumont comes to the opposite conclusion, that is the superiority of women over men. Le Prince de

⁵¹ Joan Hinde Stewart, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 24.

⁵² Joan H. Stewart, *Gynographs: French Novels by Women of the Late Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 30.

Beaumont sets forth to demonstrate that all the characteristics that Coyer sees as evidence of women's frivolousness, hence inferiority, rather constitutes proofs of their superiority. She, for instance, tackles on women's superiority in speech and literature:

Les hommes, dit-il, naturellement parlent peu, pensent beaucoup, aiment à dominer. Je conviens de ce qu'il avance; mais je le prie d'examiner si ces caractères distinguent aussi avantageusement son sexe d'avec le nôtre, qu'il l'insinue. (2)

For *Le Prince de Beaumont*, men's silence or "meditating" reveals that they experience difficulties when dealing with serious or even ordinary matters, and that they are unable to collect their thoughts and present them intelligibly and in a timely fashion. On the other hand, the fact that women are so verbal, so "voluble" and prompt to enter conversation shows that, unlike men, they neither need to pause in order to process or analyze complex information, nor do they lack the necessary intellect or linguistic apparatus to discuss abstract theories.

For *Le Prince de Beaumont* speech is more important than silence: "Pour que le silence fût préférable à la parole, il faudrait que le néant fût au-dessus de l'existence." (2) *Le Prince de Beaumont* associates speech with action, therefore perfection, and silence with idleness. According to Stewart, there is an irreconcilable difference in the ontological conception of silence and speech between Coyer and *Le Prince de Beaumont*:

The silence that Coyer implicitly extols seems to flow from unspeakable primeval mystery, and from it somehow radiates male

power. In trivializing speech, Coyer appears to suggest something antecedent to language; an eternal reality that needs no expression in time or words. For this ultimate presence acknowledged by silence, Le Prince de Beaumont substitutes a void: for silence to be preferable to speech, nothingness would have to be above existence. She demystifies silence: in speech reside vitality, continuity, responsibility, truth. (30)

Le Prince de Beaumont concludes that woman - and not man - is the masterpiece of God's creation. Indeed, man is the result of a painful process and is made out of clay or dirt, while woman was the final touch that completed God's creation.⁵³

Abbé François-Gabriel Coyer's ideas are in many ways similar to Rousseau's. He criticizes inequalities and corruption in society, the supremacy of the rich and the miserable conditions of the poor. Like Rousseau, he advocates for a new model of social relations based on "natural" equality. Yet, like in Rousseau, equality does not transcend genders.

3. Laclos

Like Montesquieu and Diderot, Choderlos de Laclos viewed the inequalities between the sexes as socially induced. The Marquise de Merteuil, one of the three main female characters in *Les liaisons dangereuses* (1782), sets out to prove just that. Yet, the way in which she does so is portrayed as

“monstruous” and it ultimately destroys her.⁵⁴ In a famous letter, she asserts that she used the only avenues of power available to her, that is her ability to use her body to seduce and gain pleasure from as many men as she wished, to dominate the opposite sex and to avenge her own (*Liaisons* 167-177). Paul Hoffmann has argued that for Laclos, sexual pleasure is the most fundamental characteristic of “nature” and the source of freedom for all human beings (540).

Man’s fears about female nature, which justify the exclusion of women from the public sphere, is reinforced by Laclos’s portrayal of women. Merteuil is depicted as perverted, duplicitous, selfish, given to intrigue, and sexually demanding. Her sexual appetite has more to do with her need to assert her power over men rather than sex per se. Merteuil’s physical disfigurement and her exile from Paris seem to be a perfect punishment for her crimes, in that she is deprived of both the goal (a place in the public sphere) and the means (her beauty and her sexuality) to access it. Under the influence of the hegemonic patriarchal ideology, the reader welcomes her physical disfiguration and her exile. In his treatise on the education of women, *Discours sur (...) les meilleurs moyens de perfectionner l’éducation des femmes*, Laclos states that woman’s “figure,” which becomes the doorway to freedom or “la jouissance” is her greatest weapon, or her “ornement principal.” It is not surprising, then, that Merteuil’s punishment consists of removing her most effective weapon against tyranny. The fact that she ultimately suffers from smallpox eliminates any possibility of

⁵³ Joan Steward, *Gynographs*, 34.

freedom and any attempt for her to use her beauty again in order to reestablish herself outside of Paris.

Among other feminists of the time, Mme Riccoboni, by 1782 a famous novelist, vehemently criticized Laclos in a series of letters exchanged with him.⁵⁵ She blamed him for depicting women as having “natural” abilities to seduce and corrupt, and for portraying Merteuil as a “vile” creature that could not be found anywhere in society:

On vous reprochera toujours, Monsieur, de presenter à vos lecteurs une vile creature, appliquée dès sa première jeunesse à se former au vice, à se faire des principes de noirceur, à se composer un masque pour cacher) tous les regards le dessein d’adopter les mœurs d’une de ces malheureuses que la misère réduit à vivre de leur infamie. («Lettre de Mme Riccoboni à Laclos », in Laclos, *Œuvres* 693)

Laclos responded by saying that the depiction of such a character was not intended for the instruction and edification of “les honnêtes femmes” (690).

Although Laclos’s depiction of women in this novel gave rise to a strong reaction, it was not uncommon. In Chapter XVII of his *Mémoires* entitled “Des Femmes,” the Cardinal de Bernis (1715-1794), draws a similar generalization about women:

Il faut convenir, à la honte des mœurs, que les femmes qui ont uniquement pour objet le plaisir d’aimer et d’être aimées, ont de

⁵⁴ Choderlos de Laclos, “*Les Liaisons dangereuses*,” in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris : Pléiade, 1979).

⁵⁵ Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni (1714-1792), like her husband Antoine-François Riccoboni, was an actress but also a writer. She authored several novels including *Lettres de Fanny Butlerd* (1767), *Histoire du Marquis de Cressy* (1758) and *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby* (1759). She died in poverty during the Revolution.

moins grands vices que les autres femmes. L'ambition de gouverner est propre à tout le sexe ; les moyens que les femmes emploient pour y parvenir ne sont pas tous légitimes : les femmes tendres ne veulent dominer que sur le cœur de leurs amants ; mais celles qui ont l'âme froide ont toutes les autres passions bien vives ; l'orgueil, l'intérêt, l'ambition, la vengeance, règnent sur elles au défaut de l'amour; et ces passions sont d'autant plus dangereuses, qu'elles se cachent presque toujours sous le voile de la fausseté ou sous le masque de l'hypocrisie.⁵⁶

Unlike Laclos's fictional portraying of single individuals, the libertine Cardinal de Bernis's portrait of women is rooted in reality and contradicts Riccoboni's argument that Laclos betrayed the rule of "vraisemblance" because such a vile woman does not exist. His essentialist definition of women revolves around their sexuality. Women are sexual beings. Women who are not driven by their sexuality constitute a greater danger, for sexuality is replaced by ambition.

In *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, the women characters enjoy a certain autonomy over their own lives. Consequently, they either become dangerously corrupted evil-doers like Merteuil or naïve victims like Cécile de Volanges and Madame de Tourvel. The latter are depicted as so naïve, as to be unable to defend themselves against the evil machinations of others. All three women are ultimately removed from society – Merteuil for her deviance, Tourvel and Cécile for their naiveté and consequent potential for sexual foul play. The disfigurement and exile of Merteuil, the death of Tourvel and the clausturation of Cécile give the story a "satisfying" (and satirical) ending which suggests that women "by nature" are

⁵⁶ Roland Mortier, eds. *Le XVIIIe siècle français au quotidien*. (Paris: Edition Complexe, 2002), 340.

incapable of governing their own lives, and therefore cannot find their place in the public sphere.

In his *Discours sur l'éducation des femmes*, echoing Rousseau, Laclos focuses on women's "natural" aptitude to perform their sexual functions. "La femme naturelle," according to Laclos, is predisposed to love and motherhood. He describes the childhood and development of women as leading to their natural abilities to seduce, reproduce, breast-feed and nurture. A woman's health, beauty and happiness are signs of her perfect connection to nature. Like Montesquieu, Laclos finds that woman's power lies in her beauty, or more specifically, in her ability to seduce.

Laclos adopts Rousseau's idea of the existence of a long-gone "âge d'or," when all properties belonged to all people; but eventually men began to appropriate things, and women became objects of exchange and gave up their freedom. (*Discours*, 390-1).

He explains that, in order to take back their freedom and find the "plenitude de [leur] être," women should not rely on men. Still according to Laclos, as long as man is physically stronger than woman, he will try to enslave her. Laclos sagaciously warns women in the following way:

Apprenez qu'on ne sort de l'esclavage que par une révolution. Cette révolution est-elle possible? C'est à vous seules à le dire puisqu'elle dépend de votre courage. Est-elle vraisemblable? Je me tais sur cette question. (391)

Certain women saw in the French Revolution the opportunity for which they had longed. The Revolution would need to be led on a double front. Women cannot rely on men for their freedom because true freedom cannot be given, it has to be taken. To reach equality and freedom, women would have to breach, on a lateral level, the social hierarchy existing between classes and, on an horizontal level, to fight the gender-based system within their own social classes.

In his *Discours*, Laclos concludes concerning women's freedom by stating that as long as slavery is the order of the day, the improvement of education for women is not a realistic or helpful enterprise (*Discours*, 391).⁵⁷

G. Chapter Conclusion

Emphasis on the female body, confining women to the maternal role gave new meaning to the notion of "deviance" amongst women. "Deviant" women were not necessarily criminal women, but rather those who engaged in activities outside the domestic sphere which "de-feminized" and "desensitized" them, such as certain kinds of writing, political activism or military pursuits. Carol Blum points out that Rousseau popularized notions about such biological or "natural" differences between the sexes, enabling domestic ideology to find its

⁵⁷ In spite of this claim, Laclos does dedicate the last few pages of his essay to prescribe reading for women. Reading can replace experience as a means to learn when experience lacks. Women should be given reading that will cultivate their "raison, pour connaître le bien; de la bonté, pour vouloir le faire; et de l'amabilité, pour en avoir les moyens." These three objectives will be reached if women are provided with the texts of "les moralistes, les historiens, et les littérateurs." (435).

expression in the sort of Revolutionary discourse which was ultimately used to keep women out of the public sphere (204-215).

Whether Rousseau's views had a uniquely negative effect on the status of women is questionable, but the fact remains that his popularization of the politics of difference had a profound effect on the way in which gender would be debated and discussed for some two hundred years. According to Thomas Laqueur, Rousseau's antifeminist stance, which became central to the articulation of both feminist and antifeminist arguments, was the most theoretically elaborate of the liberal theories of bodies and pleasures, and shows just how deeply this new biology was implicated in cultural reconstruction (18).

How did the cultural reconstruction of gender, the politics of biological, sexual difference which confined women to the domestic sphere, affect gender and the image that women had of themselves? How did women who gained public authority through their writing work within the newly developing cultural codes that required them to be passive and restricted to the domestic realm? How did their writings help to shape and resist the dominant ideologies of gender and to substitute alternatives? Finally, how did the cultural reconstruction of gender affect the perceptions and representations of these writers by literary critics and by the revolutionary press, thereby influencing the outcome of their lives? These are some of the questions with which we shall be concerned in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3

Women's Response to the Patriarchal Discourse

A. Introduction

The domestic ideology rooted in the patriarchal discourse evolving throughout the second half of the eighteenth-century illustrated men's fear of women's increasing visibility. Men sought in science the means to impose the ideology of domesticity. The necessity of relegating women to the private sphere of the home was not so much an attempt to reinforce the idea of the existence of two different spheres, the private and the public, defined by gender criteria, as it was to reinforce women's inferiority and enslavement.

If some texts such as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* present a discourse that improves the situation of women, woman is, however, always presented as man's Other. Madelyn Gutwirth states that "its cost to woman was the reaffirmation of an ancient vision of them as foreign to men in their spiritual otherness, their naturalness as opposed to their culturedness."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Madelyn Gutwirth, "Civil Rights and the Wrongs of Women," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994), 563.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that, despite the patriarchal discourse affirming woman's supposed inferiority in nature and relegating her to domesticity, this discourse did not go unopposed during the Revolution. Women subverting the patriarchal system were present in the political sphere during the Revolution.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, woman's banishment to the private sphere of the home was based on the discourse about her natural inferiority. This discourse was not intended to bring to light the existence of two distinct spheres but rather to reinforce woman's enslavement to man.

There were three major approaches opposing this ideology: 1) to oppose the discourse justifying woman's inferiority as having absolutely no place nor any role to play in the public sphere (by opposing the discourse, one also opposes the domestic ideology as it was understood by the patriarchy); 2) to present a counter-discourse which did not necessarily take a stand regarding women's alleged inferiority but rather presented the unfairness of women's situation (by doing so, one becomes visible and undermines the system itself); 3) to ignore or disregard the misogynistic discourse and be/become public by invading domains reserved to men by simply making oneself visible.

Madelyn Gutwirth notes that women were excluded from the scientific spheres.⁵⁹ Even educated women received only a minimal scientific education, if any.⁶⁰ This meant that women could not directly address biological (physiological) and medical discourses; it did not necessarily mean ignorance of such texts. Some women like Constance de Salm (1767-1845) as we shall see later, alluded to them. Midwives, nevertheless, complained about the lack of medical instruction in their profession. It was not until 1803 that the medical training of midwives was instituted and it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that women were progressively admitted to higher education.⁶¹ Women did not directly address men's science-based argument and conclusions about woman's nature, or her place and role in society. Women did, however, indirectly challenge these assumptions through their

⁵⁹ See the introduction, Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1992).

⁶⁰ To have a sense of women's progressive access to science, we should mention four important women: Julie Daubé was the first woman to be admitted to the national examination of the baccalauréat in 1861, Madeleine Bresse became the first female doctor in 1875, Bortniker was the first woman to pass the *agrégation des sciences* in 1885, and Louise-Amélie Leblois became the first woman to earn a doctorate in science in 1888.

⁶¹ Most midwives did not receive any medical training before exercising their profession. They based their knowledge of the techniques of childbirth mostly on their experience. Aware of their lack of medical education and its repercussions on their profession, some of them battled for the right to receive a basic theoretical instruction. Overcoming strong opposition in medical spheres, they eventually obtained satisfaction: basic medical instruction reserved specifically for midwives was created in 1803. Partly because of midwives' pressure, the first chair of obstetrics, although it was reserved for men only, was created in 1806.

participation in public events and through a literature dealing with exclusively feminine matters.

With the euphoria of the first social reforms implemented at the early stage of the Revolution came a debate in which both sexes participated on woman's civic status. But men were not all united behind the ideology subordinating women. As Lynn Hunt states, some politicians – such as Condorcet - recognized immediately the paradoxical nature of the new status of women⁶². If women were civil individuals under the new regime, the new state of law, they were not recognized as *active citizens* of the state. This denied them their political rights and, moreover, their political existence. The articulation of these new principles enabled critics to ask new kinds of questions about the paradox of women's civil status (Hunt 202-3). Cambacérès initiated a bill to equalize the civil status of married women with that of their husband's. In 1793, the Convention permanently rejected the bill.⁶³

Condorcet's life and thought were highly influenced by women: first his mother, Marie-Magdeleine Gaudry (1710-1784), then Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot , Julie de Lespinasse, and “other women of ability

⁶² Along with Condorcet (1743-1794), one ought to mention Cambacérès. Some writers such as Marmontel in his *Contes moraux* and *Nouveaux contes moraux*, addressing the issue of women's place in society, took a proto-feminist position.

⁶³ Marcel Garaud, *La Revolution française et la famille* (Paris: PUF, 1978), 173.

played a role in acquainting him with a lively world of mixed gender”⁶⁴, as well as his spouse, Sophie de Grouchy, all helped shape his ideas on women. He became the male champion for the cause of women. Following in the steps of Poulain de La Barre a century earlier, Condorcet actively and fiercely fought against prejudice and against stereotypes about women and also fought for the recognition of women’s equality with respect to rights and status.

Two important texts lay bare his philosophy: *Lettres à un bourgeois de New Haven à un citoyen de Virginie* (1786) and *Sur l’admission des femmes au droit de cité* (1790). The first text makes a philosophical argument for women’s rights in a *Etat-nation*, and the second one explains how such rights could be implemented. In these texts, Condorcet argues for the modification of the law that limits women’s rights and liberties, for woman’s right to full participation in a republic (the right to vote), and for the right for women to follow their *raison* and their free-will. However, Condorcet represents only a small minority in the political scene of the time. His ideas on woman encountered strong opposition from his fellow male revolutionaries. As an important political figure of the Revolution and under the constant scrutiny of his peers, he had to repress his political feminist statements so as to remain able to participate in the general

⁶⁴ Madelyn Gutwirth, “Civil Rights and the Wrongs of Women”, in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Harvard UP, Cambridge, 1994), 569.

political debate. In *Projet sur l'instruction publique* (1792), he does not include women in his vision of public education.

B. Women's Writings Challenging the Discourse.

Women did not leave their fate in men's hands. Some of them took matters into their own. Like men, they acted and wrote. In her study of female literary production, Carla Hesse, while she establishes an exhaustive list of women authors and of their writings, she nonetheless ignores two types of writings at which women of all classes and conditions tried their hand : short political texts like the *cahiers de doléances* and pamphlets as well as journalistic texts. Since we will look more closely at periodicals in chapter four, we shall focus on the former sub-genres of texts: "cahiers", pamphlets, and brief political texts. Shortly before the convocation of the Estates-General, in an anonymous pamphlet⁶⁵, *Très humbles remontrances des femmes françaises* (1788), women were already establishing their claim to citizenship by proclaiming their intent to participate in the general political debate:

⁶⁵ The author of *Très humbles remontrances des femmes françaises* (Paris, 1788) remains anonymous; however, we could argue from the title ("... des femmes françaises) and from the content of the text that the author was a woman. We can only speculate on her reasons for remaining anonymous: it could have been the fear of repercussions for engaging publicly in the male political arena or maybe because she was voicing political ideas shared by many other women and did not wish to talk as an individual but for the group.

Au milieu de la conversation générale qui s'établit entre le Monarque & ses Peuples, il est impossible aux femmes de ce Royaume de rester plus long-tems muettes. (3)

Women hoped that the king would convoke the Estates-General, and they did not wish to be marginalized. On the contrary, they intended to be active and wanted to be taken seriously: "Nous finirons comme tous les autres Corps, par demander avec chaleur les Etats généraux."⁶⁶ We can see in this short sentence (with the combination of the first person plural, the future, the use of "demander," and the adverbial expression "avec chaleur") how the author evokes a unified and affirmative political stand. Women insisted on joining men in expressing their grievances regardless of political leaning and social standing.

A few years later, Olympe de Gouges, questioning the idea of the embodiment of "universal" human rights in males only, argued for women's presence in the political debate. Because "la femme a le droit de monter à l'échafaud", she concluded that "elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la Tribune."⁶⁷

When the king, in an attempt to face France's critical socio-economic and political situation, finally agreed to convoke the Estates-

⁶⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁶⁷ de Gouges, *Ecrits politiques, 1792-93*, also in de Gouges, *Œuvres, présentées par Benoîte Groult*, 104.

General for the first time in over a century, the entire country fell into a writing frenzy. Although women were not specifically invited to share their concerns with the representatives of their order, they nevertheless committed themselves to putting on paper their complaints, grievances, *doléances* and their suggestions about some of the issues which concerned them. These *cahiers de doléances* provided women with an outlet and the opportunity to situate themselves within the public sphere. Because these women started to voice their grievances in the “cahiers,” they continued to do so throughout the Revolution, but now in the form of pamphlets.

The negative repercussions of Rousseau’s domestic ideology about women’s rights are all too clear; yet the celebration of women’s moral ascendancy through motherhood is, paradoxically, what gave women the courage to demand rights in the public sphere. Rousseau’s emphasis on motherhood may partly explain the welcome given by women to his domestic discourse.⁶⁸ Rousseau’s theories may have caused many women to feel that they deserved more respect in the domestic domain, and consequently to demand laws that would protect them from marital abuse, give them some control over family property and their children, and enable them to be better educated for their children’s benefit. These are themes frequently tackled by women in the *cahiers* and pamphlets.

⁶⁸ See Mary S. Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*.

In a pamphlet posted in Paris on November 19, 1790, entitled *L'Imprimerie des femmes*, Mme de Bastide makes a case for the creation of a free "Ecole typographique" to enable women to support themselves "par l'industrie." She foresees the commercial impact of the publishing industry :

L'imprimerie va certainement devenir un des principaux objets du commerce de la capitale. La classe indigente travaillera à l'imprimerie dans Paris, comme à Genève, elle travaille à l'horlogerie.⁶⁹

Consequently, she demands the right to a better education for women so that they can take part in a flourishing industry and provide for themselves a means of subsistence. She then broadens her analysis about women's education:

Une nouvelle constitution prépare et donne de nouvelles mœurs ; aujourd'hui que le peuple cherche à s'instruire pour s'élever à la dignité de l'homme, ne faut-il pas que les femmes, destinées par la nature à être les premières institutrices des hommes, soient, non seulement instruites de leurs propres devoirs, mais encore de tout ce qui tient aux vraies bases, aux règles et aux agréments de la Société.

L'ignorant, sot ou orgueilleux, ne se permettra plus sans doute de jeter du ridicule sur les femmes, qui par l'étude et la

⁶⁹ Mme de Bastide, "L'Imprimerie des femmes," in *1789 Cahiers de Doléances des femmes et autres textes*, Antoinette Fouque, ed., (Paris: Des femmes 1989), 85. Nothing is known about the author.

méditation chercheront à développer le germe de ces vertus, qu'elles trouvent si naturellement au fond de leur cœur.⁷⁰

In this passage, Mme de Bastide aligns herself with philosophy of the Enlightenment which asserts the importance of education as well as the domestic ideology. She sees education not as the means for understanding humanity but as a way to fulfill one's humanity. As she asserts, the educational role of mothers as their natural role, the author concludes that the education of the nation requires the education of women. Education will enhance women's virtues, which are rooted in woman's nature. By doing so, women will prevent the unfounded "ridicule" and prejudice that they endure.

Combating stereotypes and prejudice, pleading for the right to be heard, hoping to see an amelioration in their daily situation, this is what some women of the *Tiers Etat* sought. According to them, this can happen through education. In an anonymous *cahier de doléances* addressed to the king, *Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au roi*, women do not dare ask for equality, either fearing a refusal or because, brainwashed by the patriarchal discourse, they themselves may not believe in that right. They nonetheless fully understand their inferior situation and inferior place within society, which they attribute to the lack of a meaningful education:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 85-86.

Les femmes du Tiers-Etat naissent presque toutes sans fortune: leur éducation est très-négligé ou très-vicieuse: elle consiste à les envoyer à *l'école*, chez un Maître qui, lui-même, ne sait pas le premier mot de la langue qu'il enseigne; elles continuent d'y aller jusqu'à ce qu'elles sachent lire l'Office de la Messe en français, & les Vêpres en latin. Les premiers devoirs de la Religion remplis, on leur apprend à travailler; parvenues à l'âge de quinze ou seize ans, elles peuvent gagner cinq ou six sous par jour. Si la nature leur a refusé la beauté, elles épousent, sans dot, de malheureux artisans, végètent péniblement dans le fond des provinces, & donnent la vie à des enfans qu'elles sont hors d'état d'élever. Si, au contraire, elles naissent jolies, sans culture, sans principes, sans idées de morale, elles deviennent la proie d'UPremier séducteur, font une première faute, viennent à Paris ensevelir leur honte, finissent par l'y perdre entièrement & meurent victime du libertinage.⁷¹

The pessimism of women of the Third Estate resulted from their awareness of the vicious circle in which they found themselves. Lacking financial means because of their sex, they could only have access to an inferior education. Without any cultural capital, to use Bourdieu's terminology, it was difficult for them to find decent paying work and therefore to improve their situation financially. Marriage was the only recourse for women unable to support themselves. Yet, without economical capital, women could not rely on this institution. Without

⁷¹ Anonyme, "Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au roi", in Antoinette Fouque ed., *1789 Cahiers de doléances des femmes et autres textes*, (Paris: Des femmes, 1989), 26.

money or a job that might provide the necessary funds, they could not gather a dowry permitting them to marry above their class; all that remained for them was the possibility of marrying within their own socio-economic class. Thus, they could not escape their financial trouble, and once more, we come full circle.

In the *Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etats au roi*, women further emphasize the importance of an education: a greater intellectual capital would provide them with the means to improve themselves economically and morally. The deliberate juxtaposition of the expressions (“sans culture, sans principe, sans idée de morale”), expresses a sense of women’s powerlessness before their victimizers, women demonstrate the need for a suitable education. Moreover, the expressions show that woman’s depravity, condemned by the male discourse as the cause of many social evils, is indeed the result of a slippery slope initiated by men. By qualifying woman with the word “proie” (prey) and man as “séducteur,” the author appeals to the reader’s feeling and confers, at the same time, a moral aspect to each sex that is opposite of the one endowed in male discourse: women are the victims while men are the victimizers, therefore we should sympathize with the former.⁷²

⁷² We will refer to the author(s) in the singular, since we are dealing with an anonymous text which might have had several authors. To determine an individual or collective authorial voice is virtually impossible.

The author further develops this idea in the following paragraph by opposing women endowed with a myriad of positive qualities and virtues to men driven by their own interest:

Aujourd'hui que la difficulté de subsister force des milliers d'entre elles de se mettre à l'encan; que les hommes trouvent plus commode de les acheter pour un tems que de les conquérir pour toujours, celles qu'un heureux penchant porte à la vertu, que le désir de s'instruire dévore, qui se sentent entraînés par un goût naturel, qui ont surmonté les défauts de leur éducation & savent un peu de tout, sans avoir rien appris, celles enfin qu'une âme haute, un cœur noble, une fierté de sentiment fait appeler *béguettes*, sont obligées de se jeter dans les cloîtres (...)⁷³

Men's bad faith can be seen by the fact that men (the absent but real subject of the verb "appeler") not only refuse to acknowledge women's virtues and struggles, but also undermine them, denigrating women trying to escape their fate by using the pejorative term "béguettes" (prudes).

A better education had long been demanded by women.⁷⁴ What is different in these two texts is that education is not conceived as a right

⁷³ Ibid., 26-27.

⁷⁴ See for instance Mme de Miremont's *Traité de l'éducation des femmes*. In a seven volume treatise published between 1779 and 1789, she argues for a better education for girls of all social conditions (and not only for those of privileged milieus) and for the need to add the study of literature, history, geography, and a foreign language to the traditional subjects taught to girls (that is, religion, music, painting, and dance). For more information on education under the Ancien Régime see Compère, M.-M. *L'Histoire de l'éducation en Europe. Essai comparatif sur la façon dont elle s'écrit*, (I. N. R. P: Peter Lang, 1995), and Félix Ponteil, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, les grandes étapes, 1789-1964*. (Paris: Sirey, 1966), and also Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, 1800-1967*. (Paris: A. Colin, 1968).

claimed by women of leisure, but as an economical imperative for women of the poorest classes. In both texts, women's claim is based on the harsh reality of their daily lives. They do not demand equality, not even an education equal to that of men, but better consideration from their male counterparts in order to be better armed to provide for themselves and their families, and to become better wives and mothers :

Nous demandons à être éclairées, à posséder des emplois, non pour usurper l'autorité des hommes, mais pour en être plus estimées ; pour que nous ayons des moyens de vivre à l'abri de l'infortune (...).⁷⁵

They blame the failure of such goals and the behavior of some women, paradoxically echoing men's usual attacks on women, on an education not tailored to their needs:

Elles [les sciences] ne servent qu'à nous inspirer un sot orgueil, nous conduisent au pédantisme, contrarient les vœux de la nature, font de nous des êtres mixtes qui sont rarement épouses fidèles, & plus rarement encore, bonne mères de famille.⁷⁶

The novelty of this petition lies also in the fact that women, who know that they are bound by patriarchal laws and institutions, clearly express their mistrust of men's willingness to represent sincerely women's complaints at the Estates General. Because of men's bad faith, they also

⁷⁵ Anonyme, "Pétition des femmes du Tiers-Etat au roi", in 1789 *Cahiers de doléances des femmes et autres textes*, ed. Des femmes Antoinette Fouque (Paris : Des femmes, 1989), 28.

doubt the effectiveness of sending a group of female representatives to the Assembly:

Exclues des Assemblées Nationales par des Lois trop bien cimentées pour espérer de les enfreindre, elles [les femmes] ne vous demandent pas, Sire, la permission d'envoyer leurs députés aux Etats-Généraux ; elles savent trop combien la faveur aurait de part à l'élection, & combien il serait facile aux élus de gêner la liberté des suffrages. (25-26)

Consequently, after having established the legitimacy of their political voice through an opening rhetorical question ("... les femmes, dans cette commune agitation, ne pourraient-elles pas aussi faire entendre leur voix ?" 25), and encouraged by the political context, women took matters into their own hands. They re-appropriated agency over their own lives by intentionally ignoring the legal procedures that should have been followed, and addressed their grievances and concrete solutions directly to the king. Its description of this rebellious activity by women is what makes this text stand out from others written by women in 1789 and the following years, addressed either to other women to raise political consciousness, or to legislators to ask them to act on their behalf on specific matters.

In another "cahier" entitled *Cahiers des representations & doléances du beau sexe, au moment de la tenue des états généraux*, a similar course of action

was chosen by conservative women of all classes deploring their exclusion from representation at the assembly of the Estates-General. Although they iterated certain aspects of men's restrictive and misogynistic discourse on women, conservative women nonetheless argued that they had a right to represent themselves at the Assembly, rooting their reasons in history and not in nature:

Nous l'avouerons, Sire, nous avons été aussi surprises qu'humiliées de n'être point appelées aux états généraux de la nation, dont nous sommes la portion la plus aimable, la plus douce, & quelquefois la plus sensée. Nous étions certainement en état d'y porter des lumières. L'histoire atteste qu'il y a eu de grandes reines, comme il y a eu de grands rois, & que les femmes sont aussi capables de bien gouverner que les hommes.⁷⁷

What results from the first two texts is that women of the Third-Estate, at the early stage of the Revolution, did not reject the ideology of domesticity and did not claim a place in the public sphere, nor did they claim equality to men, for they were more concerned with concrete issues and the urgency of their daily reality. This suggests that the debate between the sexes about equality and access to the public sphere was contingent upon socio-economic components and was the concern of only a small minority of the population. This debate was not a battle between the sexes transcending all social classes; it was more part of a power

⁷⁷ Anonymous, *Cahiers des représentations et doléances du beau sexe, au moment de la tenue des Etats généraux*, BNF, notice n° FRBNF37262088, p. 3.

struggle within specific classes. Furthermore, these women did not long for a place in the political sphere. Rather, because of the gravity of their situation and their mistrust of men who would represent only their own interests, they felt compelled to take action, to leave the domestic sphere and to ask to be heard publicly. Women of the Third-Estate usually stepped aside from the debates on equality and sought more liberty. Generally they did not seek complete equality with men, but rather more freedom in their lives and professions in order to improve their condition and to provide themselves and their families with better means of subsistence. The request for equality usually came from women of the more privileged social classes.

The same sense of urgency that compelled women to act and denounce publicly men's misdeeds can be found in many of women's cahiers and pamphlets throughout the Revolution. The same reasons are invoked in the *Dénonciation du Sr. André par les dames citoyennes de la section de Saint Martin* written at the end of 1791, almost three years after the first cahiers:

Citoyennes,

Les tentatives criminelles des ennemis du bien public ont dû alarmer dans un temps votre patriotisme (...).

Le serment solennel que nous avons fait sur l'Autel de la Patrie d'être fidèles à la Nation, à la Loi & au Roi, nous impose l'obligation de faire entendre notre voix.⁷⁸

In the years following the fall of the Bastille, women's position had changed from passive object of men's moralizing gaze to that of active moral observer of men's behavior. They sought to detach themselves from the patriarchy and to position themselves under higher moral institutions: a nation under the law and the king. While some women viewed their presence in the body politic, and therefore in the public sphere, as their natural right since they considered themselves equal to men, others maintained that it was a moral duty *imposed* upon them - a necessity placed upon them because of political events which resulted mainly from men's participation.

In the *Dénonciation*, the women of Marseille oppose the patriarchal discourse, and particularly Rousseau, by putting their duty and even their love for the fatherland before nature:

(...)nous encouragerons nos propres enfans, & sacrifiant toutes les liaisons de la nature, à l'amour de la patrie, semblables à cette illustre Lacédémonienne, à qui l'on vint annoncer la mort de son fils dans le combat, nous dirons sans foiblesse, *je ne l'avois engendré*

⁷⁸ Anonymous, *Dénonciation du Sr. André par les dames citoyennes de la section de Saint Martin*, (end 1791), in *1789 Cahiers de doléances des femmes et autres textes*, ed. Des Femmes Antoinette Fouque (Paris : des femmes, 1981), 183.

*que pour ne pas balancer de mourir pour sa Patrie. Ah ! s'il le faut, nous mourrons nous-mêmes pour la défense de ces décrets immortels.*⁷⁹

According to the author, women's role in society is no longer restricted to one defined by what was viewed as the "nature" of their body, namely motherhood, but to their moral obligation toward the fatherland. In other words, their moral and civic duty toward the fatherland overrides their having and bringing up children described by the Roussellian discourse as women's only natural function (besides pleasing men).

Shying away from the practical claims by women at the economic bottom of the Third Estate (i.e. useful education to obtain better jobs, rights to reserve certain professions to women or to access others reserved to men), women of higher economical and social strata demanded more civil rights and equality. In her *Cahier des doléances et réclamations des femmes* (1789), a Norman woman (calling herself Mme B*** B***) asks that women be represented in the assembly of the Estates General, or in other words to be recognized as participating citizens.⁸⁰ But most importantly she asks for the abolition of the patriarchal system. As in many other similar texts by women, Mme B*** B*** reassures men explaining that women do not necessarily want to share the public sphere, even though they are as capable as men, grounding her argument and discussion in

⁷⁹ Ibid., 185.

history. Similar to the cahiers and pamphlets by women of lower castes, the author claims that women's goals do not consist of being in the public sphere but of being heard like any other citizen with whom they share the same burden (taxes and even ownership became a burden).⁸¹ There are socio-economical factors in the claims by the women represented in this cahier as well as in others.

The message that needs to be heard is somewhat different from the cahiers and pamphlets mentioned before: women must be freed from men's yoke and obtain equality to men in status and in rights. To sustain her argument, she denounces the paradox of men's discourse about universal rights and equality:

Il est, dit-on, question d'accorder aux Nègres leur affranchissement; le peuple, presque aussi esclave qu'eux, va rentrer dans ses droits : c'est à la philosophie qui éclaire la nation, à qui l'on sera redevable de ces bienfaits ; seroit-il possible qu'elle fût muette à notre égard, ou bien que, sourds à sa voix, & insensibles à sa lumière, les hommes persistassent à vouloir nous rendre victimes de leur orgueil ou de leur injustice?⁸²

By means of a rhetorical question, the author underlines the paradox of excluding women from universal rights as well as the fact that they are astonished because of it. Reaffirming the unfairness of woman's situation,

⁸⁰ 1789 *Cahiers de doléances des femmes*.. 31-42.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

she underscores another contradiction in the male discourse regarding women. Excluding women, repeatedly referred to by sympathizers of the feminine cause as the “second half of humankind”, from universal rights and citizenship constitutes the first paradox. By crossing social borders based on race to include black people in the debate concerning the universality of rights, men further underscored the contradiction of women’s exclusion. Race was considered a degenerating factor, a black was regarded as inferior to a white, and this preconception transcends the barrier of sex. At a time of reform when everyone, thanks to the Revolution and the ideas of the Enlightenment, was going to be freed from servitude, including black men and women, men nonetheless persistently refused to accept women as their equals.

In this text, Mme B*** B*** asks for nothing less than equality of rights and status between the sexes and the abolition of what she deems to be the patriarchal system. This equality is based on the similarities shared by both sexes. These similarities, physical (“formés du même limon”), physiological and psychological (“éprouvant les mêmes sensations”), spiritual (“adorant le même Dieu”), and sharing the same finality/role to one another are established by a higher power than man’s (“que la main du Créateur a fait l’un pour l’autre”). The author manages a tour de force by presenting the representatives’ moral duty to defy the injustice and the

⁸² Ibid., 33.

yoke under which women found themselves. She first reminds them that they are invested by the people to fight social injustice:

Vous ne tromperez point mon attente : j'en ai pour garants les suffrages d'une infinité de citoyens éclairés qui ont mis leur sort & leur destinée dans vos mains, & l'obligation par vous contractée, de concourir à la réforme des abus & des préjugés absurdes ou atroces qui déshonorent la monarchie françoise.⁸³

Under this mandate, women have to fight all injustice. Later, in a series of questions, she establishes the injustice of woman's place:

Mais quel moyen pourroit-on employer pour établir l'équilibre entre deux sexes formés du même limon, éprouvant les mêmes sensations, que la main du Créateur a fait l'un pour l'autre, qui adorent le même Dieu, qui obéissent au même souverain ? & pourquoi faut-il que la loi ne soit pas uniforme entre eux, que l'un ait tout & que l'autre n'ait rien?⁸⁴

These questions do not call for an answer, but they fulfill two main functions: 1) to establish the necessity of the equality between men and women, 2) to underscore the institutionalized injustice suffered by women. Therefore the representatives, obligated by their mandate, must also fight for women. Having established the legitimacy of women's

⁸³ Ibid., 33

⁸⁴ Ibid., 35.

claims, she then writes a series of incriminating comments about the patriarchal system and reflects on how to change it.

Women did not need to limit the topics of their political writings to that of woman's condition and claims for rights specific to their sex – whether to better their condition or to be granted the same rights and status as men. One of the ways to challenge the patriarchal order is to stand up to the regime. By writing and publishing political texts which spread the ideals of the Revolution, by criticizing political decisions and measures, and by analyzing political issues, women participated in the public sphere of politics.

C. Challenging the Patriarchal Order: Women in the Public Sphere.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, writing was one of the privileged means chosen by women to change the patriarchal order, to challenge the separation between public and private spheres, and to assert their presence in the public sphere. Women's presence in the public sphere goes beyond their writings. They also engaged in every aspect of the Revolution by being present in the political arena even though they were denied complete citizenship.

As Gaudineau shows in *Les Citoyennes tricoteuses*, women kept themselves informed of events and attended local meetings:

Le Paris Revolutionnaire possède ses lieux de rassemblements, animés en permanence par les groupes qui y discutent politique, vers lesquels se précipitent hommes et femmes pour s'informer de la réalité d'une rumeur. (22)

However, keeping themselves informed was insufficient. Defining the "section,"⁸⁵ Gaudineau states:

Les habitants s'y [dans les sections locales] réunissent le soir en assemblée générale où l'on discute des problèmes Revolutionnaires, des dissensions politiques locales, où les hommes votent, mais aussi où sont rendus publics des conflits privés ou sociaux. (21)

Relinquishing their role as outside observers, women also engaged daily in discussions regarding the events in their local section. Although only men could vote on the final decision, women let men know their political views within these assemblies, and they refused to be pushed aside.

They proudly expressed their political beliefs not only in assemblies but also in the street.

Au contraire, les femmes du peuple, c'est d'abord dans les rues qu'on les croise, passantes aux jupons et casaquins rayés « aux trois couleurs nationales », coiffées de bonnets « à la Nation ». Les militantes affichent leurs opinions en portant au col un médaillon représentant Marat, Robespierre ou un bonnet de la Liberté. Des cheveux coupés courts, « à la jacobine », peuvent être un choix

⁸⁵ The "section" was an administrative district in cities approximately the equivalent of a neighborhood during the Ancien régime.

politique ; cocardes et rubans tricolores sont aussi des signes d'attachement Revolutionnaire. (Gaudineau 22)

Modifying their appearances was indeed a political statement in more ways than one. As Gaudineau shows, that gave women the opportunity to show their patriotism and to take a stand, showing where they stood politically. However, it went beyond simply showing one's political preference via fashion statements. It was also a way to advertise and to contribute to the propagation of the political ideas of their affiliation or party. It replaced or added to speeches that were given. Thus, by doing so, they became public, and reaffirmed their active presence in the political sphere.

Women showed on many occasions that they ought to be counted as active participants of the Revolution, or of the Counter-Revolution. Women's active involvement should not be restricted to the march on Versailles on October 5, 1789 and to other sporadic events. We must keep in mind that the mob was always composed of both men and women, and every time there was marching, plotting or even insurrection against the government, or battles against specific measures, women were present. They appeared in the crowd on Bastille day or on the Champs de Mars preparing the celebration of the "Fédération." Like men, they shouted revolutionary slogans and were shot at when they forced the gates of the

Tuileries Palace on August 10, 1792. They bore a considerable part of the responsibility for bringing down the monarchy. They were also part of the angry mob who three weeks later killed the Princess de Lamballe⁸⁶ and put her head on a pike during the September massacres, sending a clear message to the Queen. Like men, they died under the fire of the National Guard or on the battle fields in Vendée.⁸⁷

One cannot overlook women's political engagement in the Counter-Revolution. Facing danger, many of them, like Angélique de La Fonchais, stayed in France to administer the family fortune and estates while their husbands, fathers, and brothers were safe in exile.⁸⁸

Like men, they plotted for and against the Revolution. Women were an important part of the counter-revolutionary organisation and sent political and military information abroad to the *émigrés* or collected funds

⁸⁶ Marie-Thérèse Louise de Savoie-Carignan, princess of Lamballe (1749-1792), was Marie-Antoinette's friend and confidant. Like the Queen, she was despised by the people for her lavish lifestyle and her involvement against the Revolution. She was killed on September 3, 1792 by the angry mob. Following the violent revolutionary tradition that was born during the invasion of the Bastille, her head was put on a pike and paraded through the streets of Paris.

⁸⁷ The allusion to the Vendée war illustrates women's political engagement in the Counter-Revolution and the hard price they paid on both sides of the Revolution.

⁸⁸ Most of the following names can be found in Olivier Blanc's *La Dernière lettre* in which he looks at prisons and their inmates during the Terror and gathered the last letters of fifty-seven people (mostly men) written before their execution; *La Dernière lettre. Prisons et condamnées de la Revolution 1793-1794*. (Paris: Laffont, 1984). Angélique-Françoise des Isles (1769-1793), wife of the Chevalier Desclos de La Fonchais, remained in Brittany with her two children after her husband fled to England in 1791.

to finance their cause. This was the case of Madeleine de Kolly⁸⁹ or the marquise de Charras and her friend Mme de Billens⁹⁰ who secretly sent money, jewellery and gold abroad for aristocrats who were still living in Paris. Claire-Madeleine de Villmain was arrested and guillotined in March 1794 for similar reasons.⁹¹

Moreover, women showed that, at times, they could be as strong, as fierce, as violent, and as bloodthirsty as men. In an *Adresse aux femmes de Montauban* published in *The Mercure national*, Louise de Kéralio-Robert (1758-1822), journalist and editor of the newspaper, did not condone the violent role played by women in the Montauban insurrection.⁹² In her

⁸⁹ Daughter of a rich banker in the Compagnies des Indes, and wife of Pierre-Paul de Kolly, son of a former Swiss banker at the court, Madeleine-Françoise-Joséphine de Rabec (1758-1793) was charged, after the fall of the monarchy, to raise and secure funds with her friend Regnault de Beauvoir for the restoration of the monarchy. She was arrested with her husband, Beauvoir, and Rose Uzelle, and went on trial in early May 1793. She was executed on September 5, 1793.

⁹⁰ Anne-Jeanne Roettiers de la Chauvinerie, marquise de Charras (1753-1794) was arrested and transferred to the Conciergerie in January 1794, a month after her friend Mme de Billens. They were both accused of collaborating with foreign powers.

⁹¹ Claire-Madeleine de Lambertye, countess of Villemain (1750-1794) was the mistress of the Duc de Polignac. Although she had left the country, she came back to collect and safeguard precious objects belonging to the Polignac family and even some belonging to the comte d'Artois, the king's brother. She was arrested in October 1792 and was brought to trial in March 1794.

⁹² In *Adresse aux femmes de Montauban*, published in the *Mercure national* (vol. II, N°6) founded and co-directed by Louise de Kéralio-Robert, the author condemned women's involvement in the local insurrections and violence in general: "Le sang vient de couler au gré des ennemis de la constitution; mais à l'horreur qu'inspire le crime commis à Montauban, se joint l'effroi qu'excite toujours les mouvements hors de la nature. Que le despotisme, le fanatisme, l'orgueil, l'avarice, prodiguant l'or & les promettent armes les main d'une multitude d'hommes sans aveu, sans famille, sans patrie, on en a souvent eu des exemples depuis la Revolution. Mais qu'un sexe faible & timide, dépouillant à la fois les deux sentimens qui tiennent le plus à son être, la crainte & la pitié, arme ses mains débiles contre ses concitoyens, ses amis, ses frères, ses défenseurs; qu'on voie des

Adresse aux femmes de Montauban, she encourages women to renounce violence and bloodshedding which are male characteristics. By warning against the danger of women embracing what she considered men's violent behavior, the author emphasizes women's presence in the public sphere, while asserting her own presence at the same time. Although favorable to woman's place in the home, she does not reject women's role in the public domain. What she deplors is that women were unable to remain true to their own nature and became like men. She abhors those violent monsters seeking blood and committing murder which women became when they adopt men's evil characteristics. The image of the monstrous woman was common in patriarchal revolutionary rhetoric; it was used repeatedly as a reference to women's stepping out of the sanctity of their home and undermining their *overzealous* involvement in a sphere where they did not belong, the political arena. For Louise de Keralio-Robert, aberration was not where women position themselves, but in what they did once they reached a certain public existence.

Women's engagement in the Revolution reached its climax in 1793.

At the end of 1793, laws were adopted to limit woman's political role. On October 20, 1793, women's political clubs, which had flourished since the

femmes assemblées sur une place publique, appeler les hommes au combat, provoquer les uns, exciter les autres, commander le meurtre, & en donner l'exemple ! C'est ce que les siècles barbares ne nous offrent point. (...) Malheureuses citoyennes ! quelle fureur vous aveugle ? Qui prétendez-vous défendre?" (4-5)

beginning of the Revolution, were outlawed. Women were denied the right to assemble publicly or to participate in any political debate. The Terror's excesses extended to attempts at minimizing women's participation in their Revolution, excluding them from the public sphere and limiting their role to the home. As we shall see later, the Terror was not successful in this respect.

D. Chapter Conclusion

In short, women desired to be part of the body politic in the making of a new nation. Even though women may not have enjoyed cultural or social capital, they still wanted to be politically significant. Furthermore, texts like the cahiers, the petitions, show evidence of the political participation and engagement of women of all classes in the public sphere. The texts do not support Joan Landes's theory of women's exclusion from the public sphere during the Revolution. This also shows not only the presence but also the great strength of the most subjugated women of all, that is, women from the lowest social classes of both rural and urban milieus. Madelyn Gutwirth observes how these women "still lived (...) within little-altered folk traditions of rustic subordination".⁹³

⁹³ Madelyn Gutwirth, "Civil Rights and the Wrongs of Women", in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier, (Harvard UP, Cambridge, 1994), 562.

These texts also demonstrate women's political self-posturing. As Carla Hesse has noted, women who wrote under the Ancien régime "did not cease to be women and thus their cause was not at all common with those of their male counterparts."⁹⁴ The same can be said about women who wrote during the Revolution. Writing was for women an act of political self-posturing. Political writing was an act of defiance to male authority. On the one hand, as an act, it went against the restriction of a domestic ideology that confined women and tried to silence them; on the other hand, the message conveyed in these texts established the wrongdoings of men which left women with no choice but to seek more liberty and to denounce the injustices of men, thus undermining the latter's legitimacy as patriarchal or public figures.

While some women attacked the patriarchal discourse by making public their misery and proclaiming the negative effects of their subordination to men, others simply disregarded the discourse about their submissiveness and inferior status and entered the public sphere. They became actors in the Revolution; they participated in the events of the Revolution: they created clubs, marched, demonstrated, risked and lost their lives in the midst of violent events. Some even secretly joined the

⁹⁴ Carla Hesse, "Reading Signature: Female Authorship and Revolutionary Law in France 1750-1850," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22.3 (Spring, 1989), 476.

army.⁹⁵ Although women's approaches differed, they constituted an attack on men and their way to relate to women as well as an attempt by women to be included in the public sphere.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. First, the separation between the public and the domestic sphere was not as clear in reality as it may have been conceived theoretically in patriarchal texts. Second, if men could easily deny women full, legal citizenship, it was much more difficult to prevent them from accessing the public sphere. Women of both sides of the Revolution crossed over the boundaries set by rigidly defined gender roles, and through their own initiative, rose above their roles of wife and mother.

⁹⁵ See Dominique Gaudineau, *Citoyennes tricoteuses. Les Femmes à Paris durant la Révolution française*, Paris: Perrin, Broché, 2004 and Paule-Marie Duhet, *Les Femmes et la Révolution, 1789-1794*, édition Julliard, Collection Archives dirigée par Pierre Nora et Jacques Revel, Paris, 1971. Gaudineau and Duhet both did a remarkable work examining women's participation during the Revolution

Chapter 4

Olympe de Gouges: Attacking Domesticity and Patriarchy.

A. Introduction.

Mother and widow at a very young age, Marie Aubry (1748-1793), made important life choices that challenged the patriarchal ideology.⁹⁶ She never remarried despite the moral discredit resulting from such a decision. She refused to give up her liberty and to become dependant on another man. She sought public recognition from her biological father, the notorious Jean-Jacques Le Franc de Pompignan (1709-1784). Challenging all the patriarchal principles, including the separation of public and private spheres, she overtly chose a career path reserved to men, that is writer and political activist. Olympe de Gouges, the virago, was born.

Olympe de Gouges dedicated her entire creative and political work to fighting all forms of tyranny and became one of the most radical opponents of the patriarchy.

Mostly known for her 1791 treatise, *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, and for her pamphlets which made her a prominent

⁹⁶ Marie Aubry was Olympe de Gouges's marital name. Born Marie Gouze (public records show several spellings of the family name), she was officially the daughter of Pierre Gouze and Anne-Olympe Mouisset. In 1765 she married Louis-Yves Aubry. The following year she had a son named Pierre after her legal father. Widowed shortly after the birth of her son and enjoying a certain financial independence, she left her native Montauban and settled in Paris. For more details about her life and her work, see the two biographies by Olivier Blanc, *Olympe de Gouges* (1981) .

political and feminist figure during the Revolution, Olympe de Gouges authored several political plays, *De l'Esclavage des Nègres* (1785/1789) being the best known. Both as a woman and a citizen of the New Order, her strong ideas and suggested reforms were often considered controversial and dangerous by her male revolutionary fellows. Despite fervent attacks on her and her work, she remained determined to comment upon political events and to offer suggestions for a new government. Critical of Robespierre and the Jacobins, she was arrested and sentenced to be guillotined for ideas present in her unfinished text *Les Trois Urnes* (1793). As Megan Conway explains, Olympe de Gouges bravely ignored a recently promulgated law which forbade any challenge to the republican government.⁹⁷ In this text, she calls for a public referendum asking the French people to choose between a republic, a monarchy or a federalist government.

In spite of the interest that critics have shown in Olympe de Gouges during the last decade, the author's substantial literary legacy is too often reduced to her fictionalized autobiography, *Mémoires de Madame de Valmont* (1788), her controversial play *De l'Esclavage des Noirs* (1785/1789), and what is certainly one of the most fundamental feminist texts of the period (or any period), the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*

⁹⁷ I would like to thank Megan Conway, Professor of French at Louisiana State University at Shreveport, for sending me several of articles on Olympe de Gouges, including

(1791).⁹⁸ Yet, she wrote many other texts that are also worthy of attention.⁹⁹ In these pamphlets, political writings, novels and plays, she denounces injustice of all kinds, and tried to provide remedies to social, political, and economical crises. For instance, in *Projet d'un second théâtre et d'une maternité* (1789), she argues for the construction of more sanitary hospitals for women, in particular for the indigent, and for the establishment of a theater reserved for women (women authors and actresses), allowing them to stage their own plays, while transforming the image of women from permissive to active. She was highly critical of those in power during the Revolution, Marat and even more so of Robespierre whom she attacked directly in two pamphlets.¹⁰⁰ She carefully scrutinized many political decisions and commented on them. She repeatedly and overtly launched attacks against tyranny, sexism and male domination in general. One of her favorite themes, and it was of direct concern to her, was the unfair fate of illegitimate children and their

“Olympe de Gouges: Patriot, Republican, Monarchist, Federalist” and “Olympe de Gouges: Revolutionary in Search of an Audience,” in which we find this statement. *Marie-Olympe de Gouges, une humaniste à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (2003).

⁹⁸ Olympe de Gouges’s *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, while constituting a corner stone in the history of feminist assertions against the patriarchal order, also synthesizes best the author’s work and political claims. It is the most mentioned and examined text of de Gouges’s writings.

⁹⁹ For a more detailed but still incomplete list of her published works, see the appendix “Olympe de Gouges’s works” at the end of the dissertation.

¹⁰⁰ See *Réponse à la justification de M. Robespierre* (1792) and *Pronostic sur M. Robespierre, par un animal amphibie* (1792).

mothers. It is not surprising that she chose this issue as the main topic of her first book, *Mémoires de Valmont* (1784), to mark her entrance into the public sphere.

This chapter aims to show that Olympe de Gouges adopted two different approaches to attack domesticity and patriarchy, which defined together women's inferiority and subordination to men, by examining some of her revolutionary plays hitherto ignored by scholars. The first approach, the one that has captured the interest of critics, was a bold and unapologetic attack on men's supremacy as well as a call for women's rights and equality.

However, as we will see, Olympe de Gouges also adopted a more subtle approach to subvert the patriarchal discourse. We will illustrate this idea by looking at one of de Gouges's plays written during the Revolution, *Le Couvent, ou les Voeux forcés*, first published in 1790.¹⁰¹ That play has largely been ignored by modern critics. Olympe de Gouges dealt with the same topic in another play, *Le Prélat d'autrefois, ou Sophie et Saint-Elme*, staged posthumously in 1794 and 1795 by Pierre Aubry in an attempt to resurrect and reconstruct the image of his mother.

¹⁰¹ Olympe de Gouges amended it and added some changes (including a third act) in 1792.

B. Olympe de Gouges and the Theater.

Drama was Olympe de Gouges's favorite genre. The choice of the dramatic genre as a means to assert herself in the intellectual circles and to convey her political message is significant. In spite of being the most prestigious literary genre in the eighteenth century, it was also the most male-dominated.¹⁰² Male authors and actors were foremost reluctant to valorize women's contribution. Few women wrote plays and even fewer managed to have their productions staged. Mapping women's contribution to dramaturgy in the eighteenth-century, English Showalter shows, in *Writing Off Stage: Women Authors and Eighteenth-Century Theater*, that "after Graffigny's death no more women wrote full length plays for the Comédie Française" (110) and that pedagogical plays were the only ones considered appropriate for women.¹⁰³ Mentioning Félicité de Genlis and her *Théâtre de l'éducation* (1779) and the *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes* (1785), he states that pedagogical plays were also the only area where they could write freely and hold authority (111). In contrast to

¹⁰² Besides Rousseau who saw in theater and spectacles a source of perversion of the virtuous citizen, philosophers, like Diderot, saw drama and actors as a source of moral edification. All over Europe, drama came under new scrutiny. In Germany, Lessing's writings on drama, such as *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* published in 1767 (before Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*), shed new light on the dramaturgical thought. His ideas later influenced Goethe's and Schiller's drama as well as the entire European romantic school. He advocated a critic of classical conventions, a simpler style and more realistic characters, and greater *human* complexity over classical perfection. Actors gradually became more respected. Some, like the Riccobonis, were famous and enjoyed a considerable prestige.

Félicité de Genlis, who was also a very prolific writer, Olympe de Gouges did not write pedagogical plays. She sought the same authority and freedom that men enjoyed in theater.

Olympe de Gouges's success in a male-dominated genre trumps her limited education, a fact to which she often refers in her writings.¹⁰⁴ The fact that Olympe de Gouges broke through and established herself in the prestigious, male-dominated genre constitutes a strong statement against the patriarchy and the domestic discourse.

In addition to being a particularly male-dominated genre, which, by itself, might have been a good enough reason for Olympe de Gouges to wish to excel in it, it was also the most public one. Indeed, theater was, because of its nature, a public institution, a public forum. In *Le Théâtre en France*, Pierre Frantz defines theater as being, at that time, a sort of political club «à mi-chemin entre l'église et le café, le forum et le lupanar», where it was always necessary to maintain order and where, moreover,

¹⁰³ Showalter Jr., English. "Writing off Stage: Women Authors and Eighteenth-Century Theater", *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 95-111.

¹⁰⁴Olympe de Gouges mentions her lack of education in several of her prefaces or pamphlets. She uses this fact either as an excuse to get a readership more sympathetic and tolerant of her mistakes and weak style or as an attack against the patriarchal order. For instance, in the preface of *L'Homme généreux* (1786), she admits with her usual frankness: "j'ai reçu une éducation comme on l'aurait donné du temps du grand Bayard ; et le hasard me place privée de lumières dans le siècle le plus éclairé. Je sais donc peu de choses..." (*Théâtre politique II* (Paris : côté-femmes, 1993), 41).

the police frequently made visits to report on daily events taking place there.¹⁰⁵

In one of her political texts, *Projet d'un second théâtre et d'une maternité* (1789), Olympe de Gouges attacks the Parisian theaters, which she depicts as promoters of vice.¹⁰⁶ She then suggests the creation of a « Théâtre moral » which would play a pedagogical role by showing the people good behavioral examples, teaching them virtue and good morals :

(...) un Théâtre moral, dont les actrices seraient irréprochables, conviendrait [the "théâtre moral" not the actresses] à la société des hommes policés, exciterait les vertus, corrigerait les Libertins; et à peine dix ans se seraient écoulés, que l'on reconnaîtrait que la bonne comédie est véritablement l'École du monde.¹⁰⁷

Theater gave Olympe de Gouges the opportunity to obtain double exposure, for her plays were intended to be both published and performed. Publishing limited Olympe de Gouges's readership, for only a minority could read. Normally having her plays staged enabled her to reach a much larger audience. However, the number of performances varied drastically from one play to another. Some were barely played and

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Frantz, *Le Théâtre en France* (Paris : Colin, 1992), 517.

¹⁰⁶ « Quel est le Théâtre de nos jours qui offre une Ecole des mœurs ? Dans tous, on trouve ce qui peut flatter et entretenir les vices. Ces horribles tréteaux ont fait la perte du Peuple. On voit un ouvrier se priver de pain, abandonner son travail, sa femme et ses enfants pour courir chez Nicolet, Audinot, aux Beaujolais, aux Délassements Comiques et tant d'autres qui obèrent le peuple, qui dépravent les mœurs et qui nuisent à l'Etat » in Olympe de Gouges, *Œuvres*, ed. Benoîte Groult, Mercure de France, 1986, 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

sometimes not at all: *L'Esclavage des Noirs* suffered several setbacks and was performed only once in front of a public audience. Others enjoyed a fine success: *Les Voeux forcés*, for instance, was performed more than eighty times in and outside of Paris.

De Gouges's revolutionary plays deal with specific political events: *Mirabeau aux Champs Elysées* (1791) is a eulogy dedicated to Mirabeau, whom she admired, and *L'Entrée de Dumouriez à Bruxelles ou les Vivandiers* (1793) is dedicated to General Dumouriez (1739-1823) and his military successes before 1793 when he betrayed the Revolution.¹⁰⁸ The play that we will examine, *Le Couvent, ou Les Voeux forcés*, also deals with specific political events: the abolition of religious vows in 1790 and the opening and transformation of convents in 1792. This play attacks the Church's supremacy and reflects the anti-clerical atmosphere of the time. De Gouges introduces a subversive and anti-patriarchal discourse in *Les Voeux forcés*, a political piece that deals more specifically with the illegal practice of forcing young women to enter the convent and become nuns.

¹⁰⁸ Charles-François du Prier, Dumouriez, was a Jacobin acquainted with Mirabeau, La Fayette and the Duke of Orleans. He was at the head of the Garde nationale. In the Girodin government, as a Minister of Foreign Affairs, he declared war on Prussia and Austria. As the Commandant in Chief of the Northern Army and had several military successes in 1792: the Battle of Valmy with Kellermann (September 20, 1792) which marks the beginning of the First Republic, the Battle of Jemmappes (November 6, 1792) against Austria; he occupied Belgium and on November 14, 1792, he entered Brussels. In 1793, he suffered a series of defeats (in Neerwinden and in Louvain on March 21), he started negotiations with the Duke of Saxe-Coburg, Accused of treason, he went over to the enemy.

C. The Differences between the Father Figures in Diderot's *La Religieuse* and Olympe de Gouges's *Le Couvent*.

“C'est le châtimeut d'un père et d'une mère
justement irrités.” (Diderot, *La Religieuse*)

Although Denis Diderot (1713-1784) is mostly known for his participation in the *Encyclopédie*, his novels (*Le Neveu de Rameau* (1762), and *Jacques le Fataliste* (1771)), his essays on arts, *les Salons*, written between 1759 and 1781, and his philosophical essays, early in his career, he had a very special interest in drama. He authored several plays, including two major ones, *le Père de famille* (1758), performed with success at the Comédie Française in 1761, and the controversial *Le Fils Naturel*, which was first performed in 1771 despite being written in 1757. As indicated by the title of the plays, the father figure prevails in Diderot's plays. The most radical father figure in Diderot's work, Monsieur Simonin, is, however, not to be found in one of his plays, but in one of his most famous novels, *la Religieuse* (written in 1760), even though the theatricality of the novel has been demonstrated by some critics, such as Roland Desné.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ The theatrical aspects of the novel can, among other elements, be seen in the importance of dialogues and the use of « tableaux » in the narrative structure. The use of “tableaux” can be linked not only to painting - Diderot's other passion -, but also to his theories on drama developed in *Le Fils naturel*. In the introduction of a 1968 edition of

When Olympe de Gouges wrote her play, *Le Couvent, ou les vœux forcés*, in 1790 (amending it and adding some changes in 1792), the theme of a young lady forced to take the veil against her will by the ecclesiastic community under the pressure of a patriarchal figure (in this case the Marquis de Leuville) had already previously been dealt with thirty years earlier by Diderot's novel, which is representative of the patriarchal discourse. In *La Religieuse*, Diderot's main character, Suzanne Simonin, – like Julie in *Le Couvent* – faces pressure to pronounce her religious vows from the entire community, led by her father.

Despite the resemblances between *La Religieuse* and *Le Couvent*, many differences emerge in the presentation of the father figure as they fulfill different functions. Some of the resemblances are coincidental since Olympe de Gouges never read *La Religieuse*, for it was not published as a printed book until 1796, that is several years after Olympe de Gouges's

Diderot's *La Religieuse*, Roland Desné emphasizes the dramatic aspects of the dialogues within the novel and the importance of drama in Diderot's work: " Tandis que le Salon donnait ainsi à l'écrivain le goût du tableau, c'est-à-dire le sens du visuel des êtres et des choses qui entourent et conditionnent la vie et les pensées de l'héroïne, le théâtre lui avait appris à organiser des scènes et conduire des dialogues. Avec *Le Fils naturel* (1757) et *Le Père de famille* (1758), Diderot a déjà voulu faire du théâtre ce qu'un Greuze fait en peinture et un Richardson dans le roman. (...) On a estimé que *La Religieuse* était ainsi le premier en date des romans français à faire aux dialogues une place si importante (...). L'adaptation du roman au cinéma n'a pu que confirmer la qualité dramatique des diverses scènes dialogues." (Diderot, *La Religieuse*, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1968, page 28). One can also note that Rivette, before adapting the novel into a film in 1963, had previously adapted the novel for the stage in 1961.

execution in November 1793.¹¹⁰ As I will argue here, the father figure in Diderot's *La Religieuse* – through his relationship to Suzanne – is an amplified representation of the absolute power of the patriarchal order and the image of the absolute monarchy. In contrast, Olympe de Gouges's play, written within a highly politicized context, not only represents and criticizes the patriarchal order as it comments upon the reform of an institution, but also puts forth de Gouges's suggested answer to a patriarchal society. Comparing the representation of the father figure in Diderot's novel and in Olympe de Gouges's play will highlight once more the life of eighteenth-century young girls deprived of the fundamental rights to dispose of their bodies and the right to choose for themselves whether they follow a path that has been decided for and dictated to them. Looking at these two texts will also underscore the difference between a male and a female perspective on the same issue. By the same token, this study will show the importance of de Gouges's long-neglected play.

M. Simonin in *La Religieuse* represents in many ways the patriarchal figure as it was understood in the eighteenth century. The description of M. Simonin follows precisely the ideas developed by Diderot in *Les Entretiens sur le fils naturel* regarding the presentation of the characters.

¹¹⁰ *La Religieuse* first appeared for a very restrictive audience in the *Correspondance littéraire* between October 1780 and March 1783. However, it was not before the French Revolution, in October 1796, that the novel was published for a larger audience.

Therefore, because of Diderot's desire to respect the rule of "vraisemblance" (verisimilitude) and to allow the audience (here the readers) to identify with the characters, M. Simonin becomes a representative man of his time, confronted with contemporary (universal) issues such as money, family, and marriage.

As Diderot explains in the third "Conversation" of *Les Entretiens*, we must breach Molière's tradition and renounce representing types in order to present conditions: the characters should be portrayed as the product of their social position (lawyers, doctors, philosophers...) and influenced by their familial status (father, spouse, brother...). The first sentences in *La Religieuse* presenting the father reflect precisely this idea:

Mon père était avocat. Il avait épousé ma mère dans un âge avancé; il en eut trois filles. Il avait plus de fortune qu'il n'en fallait pour les établir solidement; mais pour cela il fallait au moins que sa tendresse fût également partagée; et il s'en manque bien que j'en puisse faire cet éloge.¹¹¹

In these few sentences, Suzanne synthesizes her father's complete personality, defining him first by his profession, which not only situates him clearly in the public sphere, this also informs the reader about his social class and power. As a lawyer, M. Simonin belongs to the French bourgeoisie and participates in the rise to power of this group in

¹¹¹ Diderot, *La Religieuse*, Paris: Club des amis du livre progressiste, 1958, 2. All the quotes references come from the 1958 edition.

eighteenth-century French society. His considerable wealth confers on him important economic power, which he is not afraid to use (“Il avait plus de fortune qu’il n’en fallait pour les installer solidement”), and the nature of his profession grants him a judiciary power and a place in the public arena.

The king is not unlike M. Simonin who, as a father, exercises absolute power over his household. M. Simonin’s profession reinforces the parallel which can be drawn with the absolute monarchy, for the absolute monarch, by definition, is not only the head of the legislative and executives branches but also of the judicial branch. As the first nobleman in the kingdom, the king has the right to render justice at all levels. The choice of M. Simonin’s profession, unlike the father of Catherine Delamarre, the real person on whom the story was based ¹¹², makes him – de facto – an active member of the judicial branch, and this, combined with the economic power gained from his wealth, gives him more power in the public sphere than Claude Delamarre whose power was mercantile.

As a man of law, Suzanne’s father knows the necessity of protecting himself since the law forbids forcing religious vows even

¹¹² Even though the novel first started as a joke on the Marquis de Croismare by his friends who wanted to give him a reason to come back to Paris, it is nonetheless based on a true story. Many such as Pierre Daix, in his introduction to *La Religieuse* (Diderot, *La Religieuse*, Paris : Club des Amis du Livre progressiste, 1958), and George May’s study (*Diderot et “La Religieuse”*. Paris: PUF, 1954) in particular, mention the circumstances in which the novel started, and refer to the real person on which the story was based.

though it was common practice. In a letter that Suzanne writes to her father, she gives in to the pressure and agrees to take her vows. This letter then becomes an important instrument in reinforcing Mr. Simonin's will and protects him before the authorities. The legality of M. Simonin's orders and actions is never openly questioned, not even by Suzanne. M. Simonin remains above the law in the sense that, despite his knowledge of the law, he never feels personally threatened by it: the letter written by Suzanne, although it was extorted, provides him the legal basis to keep Suzanne secluded within the confines of the convent. The lawsuit later filed by Suzanne only aims to have the vows revoked in order to regain her liberty, and not to condemn or incriminate M. Simonin for having forced her to take her vows: neither he nor his actions are subjected to the possibility of a trial.

Once the social status of M. Simonin is established, Suzanne, the narrator/hero, can then continue presenting her father with his family status, which progressively leads to the private sphere of the home. The narrator has informed us that M. Simonin is a married man and a father of three daughters, which, in a sense, reinforces his position as the patriarchal figure, for he is surrounded by women and there is no son who, driven by an oedipal relationship with the father figure, might challenge or share his authority. The formulation of the sentence ("Il avait

Unlike M. Simonin, a lawyer, Claude Delamarre was a jeweler ("un joaillier-orfèvre,"

épousé ma mère”, “Il en eut trois enfants”) confers on him the agency within the family while depriving his wife and his children of any agency. The active voice characterizes the patriarchy while the wife is the object of the father’s actions and is therefore characterized by the passive voice. Being thus deprived of any agency, the wife/mother’s deeds and public utterances must follow the father’s philosophy. After Suzanne refuses publicly to take her vows and is confined to the family’s house, Mrs. Simonin’s confessor, Father Séraphin, explains to the young girl the difficulty of her situation and the reason why she cannot expect any help or empathy from her sisters, reinforcing the patriarchal system:

(...) et je ne vous conseille pas de compter sur elles si vous venez à perdre vos parents (...). Et puis elles ne peuvent plus rien; ce sont les maris qui font tout: si elles avaient quelques sentiments de commisération, les secours qu’elles vous donneraient à l’insu de leurs maris deviendraient une source de divisions domestiques.
(25)

Although Father Séraphin’s ostensible purpose is to comment on Suzanne’s sisters’ relation to their husbands, the subordination of the spouse to her husband and her absolute lack of power emphasizes the sexist foundations on which her mother’s marriage is based. The same comment can also be applied to Mme Simonin. Therefore, every time the mother is associated with the father regarding the decision to have

Daix, p.x).

Suzanne take her vows - even though she has her own reasons -, it is indeed the father's voice, the father's decision. She is a supporter, a follower of the father, rather than a partner in the making of the decision. Suzanne emphasizes the patriarchy by always mentioning the father first - after all, he is the head of the family -, and then the mother.

While Suzanne continues to present the story, she establishes her father as a moral figure, even though it is in a concessive clause:

Je me suis souvent demandé d'où venait cette bizarrerie dans un père, une mère d'ailleurs honnêtes, justes et pieux. (Diderot 2)

This moral portrait overlaps both spheres, public and private, as it illustrates M. Simonin's morals, virtue and spirituality.

Enjoying economical, judicial (and therefore political), matrimonial and moral power, M. Simonin is a perfect citizen and member of the patriarchal society despite his lack of affection for Suzanne, which is not, according to eighteenth-century standards, in contradiction with the role of a father.

However, M. Simonin is not Suzanne's real father. Suzanne is the fruit of an extra-matrimonial affair between her mother and a man about whom we know nothing. Yet, he is the only true father figure in the novel. Despite Suzanne's attempt to establish in the Marquis de Croismare and Father Séraphin (confessor to both her and her mother) as other fatherly

figures, they do not replace or counterbalance M. Simonin. His authority is absolute and – as a monarch is the father of the nation – M. Simonin is the absolute monarch within his own realm.

The parallel with an absolute monarch can be further seen not only in the fact that he is the sole father figure but also in his relative absence or distance. Diderot begins the narration of the drama by having Suzanne narrate her own story, writing her memoir for the Marquis de Croismare, creating a story within the story, in an intradiegetic narrative. Thus, the presentation of her father is not at a diegetic but intra-diegetic level. From the beginning, the presentation of the father figure is already mediated, which parallels the constant distance from her father throughout the text. Except for the scene where Suzanne is confronted by her father with her decision to surrender and take the veil, the father never directly speaks to his alleged daughter. This particular exchange/dialog, an adaptation of stichomitia used in the theater, takes the form of short questions and answers, thus emphasizing the distance and accentuating the absence of any love or even affection between M. Simonin and Suzanne.

M. Simonin's speech, comments, and orders are never directly reported:

“Je vis mon père. Il me parla froidement.” (Diderot 15), *«Quelques discours échappés à mon père dans sa colère»* (Diderot 2).

The use of intermediaries (M. Simonin, the Mother Superior, Father Séraphin, Mme de Boni) works as a constant reminder of his presence despite his physical absence.

As a despot, M. Simonin will suffer no opposition to his authority, power or position. He is an extremely strict, authoritarian and violent man, maintaining fear within his family and environment. He may dispose of Suzanne as he wishes, and his cruelty in doing so leads Suzanne to question her origin: "Tant d'inhumanité et d'opiniâtreté de la part de mes parents, ont fini de me confirmer ce que je soupçonnais de ma naissance" (21). When the Mother Superior talks to Suzanne regarding her imprisonment in the convent of Sainte-Marie, she reinforces the idea that Suzanne's fate is subjected to her father's authority ("*vos parents peuvent changer de résolution*" (8). As does Suzanne a little later: "*Je vis clairement qu'on entendait disposer de moi sans moi.*" (14). This is an important moment in the narrative since the deconstruction of Suzanne's humanity has begun and is clearly stated. As J.F. Revel notes:

Ce que Diderot a voulu prouver dans la Religieuse, c'est que l'être humain (...) se décompose, à partir du moment où on le prive de sa liberté. ¹¹³

In this sentence, one can see the deconstruction represented by Suzanne at three levels: "je", the person witnessing the situation (the morale figure in

a sense), then “moi”, the object being disposed of; and finally the “moi” (“sans moi”), the agent of the action “disposer” or rather the non-agent (“sans moi”), the real agent of the action (“on”) being indeed the father and his followers. Suzanne is deprived of her liberties but also of her humanity; she has no agency nor any say over her body or her intellect. Her objectification is a necessary step to render M. Simonin’s absolute power.

Suzanne, as the fruit of adultery, is a constant reminder to M. Simonin of his failure as a patriarchal figure and by the same token, challenges the very reason for the existence of the whole patriarchal society; that is to guarantee the legitimacy of the lineage. Therefore, Suzanne’s illegitimacy must be kept secret and Suzanne must be kept locked away from the public. Because of her existence, her being, she is an affront to his authority and status, and therefore needs to be contained. As her legal father, he chooses to use all the power granted to him by society and there is little Suzanne can do: “Hélas! Je n’ai ni père ni mère; je ne suis qu’une malheureuse qu’on veut enfermer ici toute vive” (Diderot 5). The doubt about M. Simonin being Suzanne’s biological father is present from the beginning of the novel and is stated in three different ways:

¹¹³ J. F. Revel, *Diderot, La Religieuse*, 8.

Peut-être mon père avait-il quelque incertitude sur ma naissance; peut-être rappelais-je à ma mère une faute qu'elle avait commise, et l'ingratitude d'un homme qu'elle avait trop écouté. (3)

This is confirmed several times later in the text (by Father Séraphin, Mme Simonin, and Suzanne herself), illustrating that the patriarchal order is jeopardized. The only times she is relieved from her torment in the convent is when she agrees to give up any right to her self:

je dis donc qu'on était maître de mon corps, qu'on pouvait en disposer comme on voudrait; qu'on exigea que je fisse profession, et que je la ferias. Voilà la joie revenue dans toute la maison, les caresses revenues avec toutes les flatteries et toute la séduction. (14)

M. Simonin's death (and that of the mother) establishes in a way the triumph of the patriarchy in the sense that, despite Suzanne's opposition to her father, which remains within the private sphere of the home or the convent, she eventually takes her vows. Her father will not witness her attempt to have it revoked by the court. He never shows any kind of regret or repentance regarding his decision, nor the method or tyranny used to achieve his desired result. His will, despite Suzanne's contestation, is eventually carried out even after his death. Suzanne's attempt to recover her freedom legally can only occur once she is liberated from her parents. Her father, but also her mother, for the latter agrees with the father's decision to keep Suzanne locked in the convent, must die

before the heroine's voice may be heard in a trial. Furthermore, the father's authority remains fundamentally intact even after his death, for Suzanne first remains in the convent where her father's order are carried out and only alienation can result from her confrontation with the patriarchal authority. Her escape makes her an outcast, a pariah, and the readers, as they near the end of the novel, can surmise from her thoughts of suicide that Suzanne's fate is destined to be tragic.

The open ending of the novel underlines the triumph of the patriarchy, for Suzanne's forced vows are not yet revoked, and her future is dark, without hope: several scenarios may be possible and the suicide mentioned at several occasions by Suzanne in case she is captured and forced back to the convent is one of them. However likely suicide may be, the outcome of the novel remains nonetheless uncertain and is left to the reader's imagination.¹¹⁴

The case of Suzanne Simonin in *La Religieuse* has been used as an example of the realities of the patriarchal system in the Old Order. The novel is a fictionalized interpretation of a real case, and neither the original nun nor Diderot's counterpart succeeds in revoking her vows. The system remains in place. Olympe de Gouges's play takes a different

¹¹⁴ An happy ending in favor of Suzanne is unlikely, for it would be a complete "côup de théâtre." In the *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* (1757), for the sake of verisimilitude, Diderot condemns the "deus ex machina", which he viewed as too artificial. Rivette's film, on the other hand, leaves no doubt about Suzanne's fate in his rather faithful adaptation of the novel.

direction. In *Le Couvent, ou les vœux forcés*, Julie, a young aristocrat and an orphan, lives in a convent where she had been placed at a very young age under the care of Angélique, Julie's mother who must hide her real identity from everyone including her own daughter. The Marquis de Leuville, Julie's uncle who killed her father many years earlier because he disapproved of him, wants to force her niece to become a nun. To do so, he announces that he will no longer pay her alimony nor will he provide a dowry, depriving her of any financial resource. His accomplices in the Church, the Vicaire, the Archbishop, and the Abbess try to force Julie's decision in spite of the Priest who wants Julie to willingly take the vows. Leuville's son, the Chevalier, who does not know Julie's real identity, fell in love with her a few months earlier while visiting the convent with his father. Despite the opposition of his father, who threatens to disown him, he intends to marry her. To find happiness, Julie and the Chevalier must combat the father's despotism, and the unlimited authority and corruption of the Church.

Like M. Simonin, the father figure in *Le Couvent* represents the patriarchal order and shares most of the same personality traits. Le Marquis de Leuville, the father of the intrepid Knight ("le Chevalier") in love with Julie, is an authoritarian, violent man. In act II, sc. V, the Chevalier, disguised as a priest, manages to have a tête-à-tête with Julie, and is caught by the nuns and the Abbess while proclaiming passionately

his love to her. After he identifies himself as the son of the Marquis to the outraged Abbess, she reminds him in a brief sentence charged with a prophetic, almost apocalyptic tone, of his submissive role as a son and the power of his father: “Tremblez, téméraire, votre père va paraître.” The underlying religious tone reproduces the religious discourse and allows a reversed analogy with God who is traditionally referred to as the Father. Here, the father is someone akin to God, and the son is to fear his father’s wrath as one shall fear God’s. The relation to the father is based on fear; the imperative form of the verb implies the weakened position of the son in relation to his father, defining the father-son relationship as a relation between dominator/dominated. The father figure is defined by the fear one has of him; this fear is the foundation of the “respect” for the father mentioned in the text and demanded by him.

It is important to note that, by creating a legal and moral discourse, the dominant discourse supports the Marquis in the necessity to reassure the father as the potentate by allowing him to “laisser cours à son indignation”:

Si je n’écoutais que mon juste courroux... Tremble de m’irriter d’avantage... Sors te dis-je avant que je me livre à mon indignation.
(II, 6)

This idea can also be found in *La Religieuse* : « *C’est le sentiment d’un père et d’une mère justement irrités*» (Diderot 31). The patriarchal discourse puts

the emphasis not on the intensity or the violence of the father's wrath but on its moral aspect, by legitimizing the father's outburst: the outburst, however violent it may be, is the result of the children's attempt to deter the patriarchal authority. All this turmoil could have been avoided had the son respected the father's authority. It is then the oedipal necessity to confront the father that is to blame for the outburst, which is hitherto justified and considered as "fair" by the patriarchal dominant discourse.

Like M. Simonin, the Marquis de Leuville will suffer no shadow over his authority and patriarchal status. His sister married without his blessing, which constitutes the first affront to his authority and status, and became pregnant with Julie (second affront). He then chooses to act upon these attacks in order to re-establish his patriarchal authority by secretly murdering his brother-in-law and hiding his sister and her child in a convent, removing them from the public eye. In spite of the fact that this is enough to restore his patriarchal status, he shows the extent of his power and reveals a sadistic side by forbidding his sister and the nuns to reveal to Julie her true identity and that of her mother. Since restoring his status requires murder and kidnapping, Gouges is obviously questioning that status. These events however are extra-diegetic since they occur before the beginning of the play, which opens the day before Julie is supposed to take her vows.

However, this is where the similarities between the two father figures end, for Olympe de Gouges's play is far more political than Diderot's novel. The title demonstrates a shifting from the story of an individual (la religieuse) – in a way anecdotal – to the depiction of an institution (the convent) or that of a custom (“les vœux forcés”). As Gisela Thielen-Knobloch notes, the play was written in the midst of the debate regarding ecclesiastic institutions: the National Assembly abolished monastic vows on February 13, 1790 and opened the doors of convents and monasteries; the same year in April, it discussed about turning Catholicism into a State religion.¹¹⁵

The father's social status is the first difference with respect to M. Simonin. The Marquis belongs to the French aristocracy and, as such, represents the Ancien Régime and, within the context of the Revolution, he is a member of a privileged class on its way out. The reason behind de Gouges's decision to portray the father as an aristocrat can only be surmised since there is no paratext explaining her decision. Should one see in the Marquis de Leuville the image of de Gouges's real father, the Marquis Le Franc de Pompignan who refused to recognize her as his

¹¹⁵ In Olympe de Gouges, *Théâtre*, tome 1, Indigo & Côtés femmes éditions, Paris, 1991, Gisela Thielen-Knobloch notes that “La pièce se situe au coeur du débat sur le statut de la religion pendant la Revolution. Après l’effondrement des murs de la Bastille, les murs des couvents doivent aussi s’écrouler. Le 13 février 1790, les vœux monastiques sont abolis. Le 13 avril, l’Assemblée nationale votait pour savoir si le catholicisme allait devenir religion d’Etat. Des productions anticléricales étaient de ce fait à l’ordre du jour.” (14-15)

daughter like M. de Leuville who rejects Julie? M. de Leuville's sudden change of mind at the end of the third act as he moans over his past actions and welcomes Julie and Angélique back in the family could then be interpreted as the fulfillment on stage of what de Gouges was unable to have in her real life: the recognition of her father. As Olivier Blanc explains, de Gouges's biological father played an important role in de Gouges's decision to become who she was and is an important character in her fictionalized autobiography, *Les Mémoires de Madame de Valmont*. Even though one may surmise from this resemblance that he inspired the character of the Marquis, it would be a fallacy of intention to accent such a statement as an absolute truth.

In spite of his power and the fear he wants to inspire, the Marquis de Leuville's authority is contested. The Grand Vicaire, the Archbishop, and the Abbess, defending their positions and their interests, naturally take his side. And, as we saw earlier, he certainly succeeds in responding to his sister's defiance, but not before it is too late: she is already married and has a daughter.

However, the most obvious threat to his authority comes from his own son with whom he has an oedipal relationship. Julie is portrayed by the Chevalier as the cause for his temerity and rebellion against the father: had he not fallen madly in love with the beautiful Julie (or had he been able to control his libido), he would have remained a silent and obedient

son like he was when he used to come to the convent with his father. Instead, willing to endure the wrath of his father, he defies him throughout.

The Priest, who makes a point of having Julie freely make her decision regarding her vows, is also a threat to Leuville's authority. Meanwhile, the people alerted by the valet Antoine, outraged by Julie being forced to take her vows, approach the convent in a mob with a Commissaire (a policeman) in order to stop the ceremony and free Julie. The revolt of the people against the aristocrat and his accomplices generates another level of contestation about the patriarchal authority while bringing the political into the theatrical, what Janie Vanpée calls a politicization of the theater during the French Revolution, which also parallels the theatricalization of the politics.

Angélique witnesses the power of the Chevalier's love for Julie and her sense of sacrifice to avoid him the wrath of his father ready to disown him. She escapes from the cell where she was locked up by the Abbess. She finally stands up to her brother revealing publicly the crime he committed and establishes her identity and Julie's.

Consequently, the Marquis, having seen so many powerful virtues in each of the characters (Julie, his son, Angélique), suddenly changes his mind: the recollection of his atrocities and Julie's drama generates a cathartic effect. The result is a pathetic scene, very melodramatic.

De Gouges presents here the example of a repentant father doing the right thing, which is allowing the two lovers to choose their own destiny: he asks Angélique for forgiveness. The conflict is finally resolved in the last scene. Julie does not pronounce any vows, the Chevalier gets his bride, Angélique's secret is revealed, her turmoil (physical and emotional) is ended, and the Marquis repents. In a word, it is the triumph of the truth, liberty, and justice; the Priest proclaims:

Madame, ce n'est pas à moi que vous rendez justice, c'est à la vérité, c'est au culte de Dieu ennemi de la persécution. Mais oublions le passé, et qu'une morale plus douce rende à l'avenir ces asiles moins redoutables.¹¹⁶

We might see, with this last sentence "oublions le passé," de Gouges's invitation to the citizens of the Revolution is to forget the past, to close the book on the Ancien Régime in order to work on creating a new society. She is also proposing a new model.

In *La Religieuse*, Diderot did not expressly condemn the father's behavior: Suzanne's narration of her story is never interrupted by an heterodiegetic, omniscient persona and remains throughout the text homo-diegetic. Diderot also allows the readers to draw their own conclusions despite Suzanne's establishing the reasons for her parents'

¹¹⁶ Olympe de Gouges, *Théâtre*, tome 1, Indigo & Côtés femmes éditions, Paris, 1991.

animosity and their persecution. These factors constitute, with other elements in the text, an appeal to the readers' sympathy.

On the other hand, De Gouges gives the spectators a closed, positive ending in which the tyrannical father figure is made to realize the damaging effects of his despotic power. His consent to his son's and niece's union follows Angélique's: "Ma soeur, vous ratifiez leur choix. (Il quitte ses enfants, Angélique prend la place)." Indeed, she is the one from whom he learns the true duty of a parent: "Souvenez-vous que la félicité de vos enfants est votre premier devoir." (87) The Marquis then disappears and lets Angélique take his place, replacing the patriarchy with the matriarchy. With the verb "ratifier", Angélique is not only given the right to approve or reject this union, but also the power to give existence to this union, to acknowledge its essence, to recognize it as good and legitimate. This is innovative since, as R. Heyer shows in his article, *Mariage et féminisme*", wives and mothers had little say in this matter, Unlike Madame Simonin, Angélique becomes an active moral figure with the power to participate positively in the decision making process regarding the family.

Olympe de Gouges finishes the play by stressing for the audience the didactic value of exposing people to such virtue: the Marquis concludes by stating: "Que mon exemple vous serve de leçon" (87), and the Abbess, also transformed by the exhibition of such virtue, replies: "cette

scène touchante m'apprend un nouveau devoir" (88). Olympe de Gouges not only emphasizes the aberration of forced vows but also invites any spectator or reader who might defend the patriarchal order to follow the example of the Marquis and the abbess, that is to allow women an active role and permit them to take part in the elaboration of a new order. Wendy Nielson adroitly synthesizes the content of her dramatic work: "Her plays, for example, revolve around contemporary themes and real events, thus underlining the authenticity of women's issues (and pushing the association of women with romance and intrigue into the background). (...) This reality or documentary theater is an extension of Gouges's feminist agenda, which demands that spectators view her dramatic personae as real figures with genuine connections to French public life."¹¹⁷

D. Chapter Conclusion

To conclude, the father figures in Diderot's *La Religieuse* and de Gouges's *Le Couvent, ou les vœux forcés* represent the patriarchal order as strong, authoritarian, violent, and oppressive. However, despite some similarities in the themes and in the ideology present in both texts, the representation of the two father figures illustrates the authors' different

¹¹⁷ Wendy C. Nielson, "Staging Rousseau's Republic: French Revolutionary Festivals and Olympe de Gouges", in *The Eighteenth Century* 43.3 (2002): 268-285, p.279-80. In this article, Nielson does not mention *Le Couvent*.

agendas. Unlike Diderot who offers no solutions to the tyranny exercised by the patriarchy in part by leaving an open ending to Suzanne's fate, Olympe de Gouges' critical and political depiction of the patriarchy leads to the abolition of an oppressive system, to be replaced by another system in which matriarchy is included and eventually prevails. Gouges's play belongs to the Revolutionary festival that "gave women access to the public stage" (Nieslon 275). Her play illustrates and comments on political events which were then unfolding, that is the interdiction of the forced vows by the Assemblée nationale and the debate on religious institutions. De Gouges tries to negotiate a place for women in France's new public order. She seeks to demonstrate that a patriarchal society where women are mere domestic partners under the authority of men does not differ from the tyranny of the Old Regime, suggesting that a virtuous society should be free from tyrannical relationships. At the end of her play, she seeks to participate in the elaboration of the new republican identity by creating an idealized order in which women are active participants.

Often criticized, attacked and rejected, Olympe de Gouges remained strong and determined to fight tyranny and have liberty, equality and justice prevail for all, regardless of sex or social class. Her life and her work reflect her political engagement. Her writing is deeply grounded in her own life, political choices and feminist convictions. Because everything in her life, in her political standing and in her writings

threatened overtly the hegemonic patriarchal discourse, she had to be removed. She was arrested on 20 July 1793.

Confiscated at the time of her arrest, an unfinished text entitled *Les Trois Urnes* gave her prosecutors the necessary ammunition to sentence her to death. As Megan Conway explains, Olympe de Gouges willingly ignored a law making any challenge to the republican government an offense punishable by death.¹¹⁸ In *Les Trois urnes*, she calls for a public referendum asking the French people to choose between a republic, a monarchy or a federalist government. Armed with courage even in jail, she continued to overtly criticize the government. During her one-day trial she was denied a lawyer. Condemned to death, the guillotine silenced her the next day, but not forever; her legacy lives on.

¹¹⁸ I would like to thank Megan Conway, Professor of French at Louisiana State University at Shreveport, for sending me several of articles on Olympe de Gouges, including "Olympe de Gouges: Patriot, Republican, Monarchist, Federalist" and "Olympe de Gouges: Revolutionary in Search of an Audience," in which we can find this statement.

Chapter 5

Women and the Public Sphere after 1794

A. Introduction

The execution of Olympe de Gouges on November 4, 1793 coincides with what could be considered the beginning of the end of women's overt public and political existence. As we saw in chapter 2, women's engagement in the Revolution reached its climax in 1793. With the Terror came a series of regulations that severely damaged women's public presence. In July 1793, Robespierre came to power. Men outlawed any kind of women's participation in public life, forbidding women's clubs or any meetings of women in public. During Robespierre's reign (from July 27, 1793 to July 28, 1794), women's presence in the public sphere was greatly weakened.

Although these restrictive measures dealt a severe blow to women's morale and their presence in the public arena, they did not end women's participation. This succession of measures did not necessarily mean that the patriarchy had succeeded in confining women within the walls of their homes and keeping them away from the public sphere. They

only stopped women momentarily. Women kept participating in political events, thus contributing to the shaping of public opinion even after 1794.

B. Women's presence after 1794.

With the fall of Robespierre on July 28, 1794, women regained partial access to the public sphere, but not to the extent to which they had enjoyed access during the first phases of the Revolution (1789-1794). Several examples suffice to illustrate women's presence in the public sphere during and after 1794.

In 1795, some women challenged the political environment established by the patriarchal order. In March 1795, a woman called veuve Vignon was arrested for distributing two pamphlets, *Peuple, réveille-toi, il est temps* and *AU Peuple des vérités terribles mais indispensables*. Determined not to be silenced, she stood up against the authorities and voiced her political convictions: two days after being released, she was once again apprehended for a similar crime.¹¹⁹

Although women were forbidden to create or to belong to clubs and to gather in public, they still continued to attend political assemblies. Having not completely succeeded in reducing women to a domestic role, the Convention, redoubling its efforts to silence women's political voice,

¹¹⁹ See Gaudineau, 25

acted one more time against them: on May 24, 1795, women were forbidden to attend political assemblies.

Deprived of the means to make themselves visible, women's main participation in the public sphere, as a group, was reduced for the most part to that of the faceless, mixed gender crowd. Women were part of the crowd that shouted their discontent and welcomed Robespierre's arrest on July 27, 1794. Women showed that they, along with men, were political beings.

With the Convention a period of calm followed. Insurrections and uprisings were less and less frequent, but there still remained opportunities for women to join in crowds and show their discontent. On February 1796, the government, trying to abolish the system by which Paris was fed at the expense of the rest of the country, ordered the end of a fixed, nominal price for bread and meat. People, and particularly women who were responsible for providing food for the household, remembered well the years 1788-1789 when, due to soaring inflation, the price of flour and bread rose tremendously, and a loaf of bread could cost as much as a month's salary. Hence there was widespread consternation when the government announced its intention: most Parisians felt threatened by starvation. This caused an uproar in which women participated. Eventually the government yielded to the outcry.

In this context, many women of the poor classes naturally sympathized with the *Conspiration des Egaux* led by the political agitator and journalist François-Noël Babeuf (1760-1797).¹²⁰ In March 1796, women, along with thousands of workers, began to rally around Babeuf when the Directoire tried to replace the *assignats* with *mandates*, fuelling the rumor of national bankruptcy. Women, like men in cafés, sang and applauded Babeuf's song *Mourant de faim, mourant de froid*:

Mourant de faim: mourant de froid

Peuple dépouillé de tout droit,

Tout bas tu te désoles :

Cependant le riche effronté,

Qu'épargna jadis ta bonté,

Tout haut, il se console.

Un code infâme a trop longtemps

Tombe le règne des brigands

Sachons enfin où nous en sommes

Réveillez-vous à notre voix

Et sortez de la nuit profonde

¹²⁰ François-Noël Babeuf (1760-1797), known as Gracchus Babeuf, was a journalist, a prolific writer, and a famous political agitator. Scholars such as R.B. Rose and Ian H. Birchall have used words like "socialism" and "communism" to qualify his ideas. Settling in Paris in 1794, he founded the newspaper *Le Journal de la liberté de la presse* which later became *Le Tribun du Peuple*. Babeuf was executed on May 22, 1797 for his role in the *Conspiration des Egaux* (Conspiracy of Equals). A year earlier he was arrested on May 10, 1796, a day before his attempt to overthrow the government with the help of troops stationed in the camp of Crenelle. For more information on Babeuf, see R.B. Rose, *Gracchus Babeuf: The First Revolutionary Communist* (Stanford UP, 1978); Ian H. Birchall, *The Spectre of Babeuf* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1997).

Peuples! Ressaisissez vos droits
Le soleil luit pour tout le monde

Tu nous créas pour être égaux
Nature, ô bienfaitante mère!
Pourquoi des biens et des travaux
L'inégalité meurtrière ?¹²¹

Although the lyrics do not refer directly to woman's situation under the patriarchal hegemony, the song can be applied to the struggles that women endured because of their gender. Images that had previously been used by women advocating recognition of equality between the sexes are present in this song, such as the sun shining equally for all, or the dark in which they are confined because of their situation.

In May 1796, women made themselves heard one more time, as participants in the *Conspiration des Egaux*:

Salut en démocratie, oui en démocratie car on entend des porteurs
d'eau et des blanchisseuses dire "nous sommes souverains."¹²²

The orator of these lines identifies the sovereignty of the people as a necessary condition for the establishment of democracy. The reference to the water carriers and washer women pays tribute to the poorest classes

¹²¹ The words of this song can be found in "De Samenzwering van Babeuf" (chapter XII) in H.P.G. Quack, *De socialisten, 1875-1897*, e-text available at <http://www.tomaatnet.nl/~cisquet/quack-1-XII.htm>

¹²² National Archives of France, A.N., F⁷ 4277, quoted in Gaudineau, 28

as the reason for which and by which democracy can truly exist. It is also a direct attack against the governing bourgeois class which excluded the have-nots from the right to vote.¹²³ The fact that women were explicitly mentioned indicates that, despite the attempts to exclude them from the political sphere since the Terror, they nonetheless managed to assert themselves and make their voices heard at crucial times. These few examples, drawn from many available, demonstrate that women were still challenging the patriarchal system which was trying to deny them any overt political significance.

With the progressive establishment of a period of relative political and economic stability, women did not have as many opportunities, nor the legal means, to express their political existence. They were forced to find new ways to challenge the patriarchal system and the separation of public and domestic spheres. Writing and publishing, once more, became

¹²³ The Constitution of 1791 granted the right to elect representatives to any male citizen who could afford and was willing to pay the *cens*, the equivalent of three days of work. Thus, about three million men were deprived of the right to vote. In 1795, the Directoire restricted the participation in the electoral system, defining the active citizens as landowners. The Restoration (1814-1830) reinforced the exclusion of the poorest classes from the electoral process by granting the right to vote to those who pay at least three hundred francs in taxes and the right to become eligible for an office to those paying at least a thousand francs in taxes. It was not before the Second Republic (1848-1852) that the so-called "universal" suffrage, though still excluding women, was implemented in France. By bringing together in the same sentence the reference of people deprived economically and their cry "nous sommes souverains", the orator alludes to article 7 of the Constitution of 1793 ("Le peuple souverain est l'universalité des citoyens français"). The restitution of this constitution was one of the main demands of Babeuf and the partisans of the Conspiracy des Egaux.

the privileged means that women had at their disposal. However, this left women of the poorest class without a voice.

C. Constance de Salm.

In 1797, Constance Pipelet (1767-1845), born Constance de Theis, later known as Princess Constance de Salm, published a poem entitled *Epître aux femmes*, in which, siding with other women struggling against the patriarchal discourse, she exhorted women to react. Although the text was originally written to defend women authors who were under attack, it provides a defense of woman in general:

En nous [women] rendant l'objet de critiques, d'accusations de toute espèce, pouvaient-ils [men] se dissimuler que ce n'était point seulement les femmes qu'ils offensaient ; mais leurs mères, leurs sœurs, leurs compagnes ; celles à qui les hommes doivent le bonheur, la consolation, le charme de toute leur existence ?¹²⁴

In the preface to the text, she questions a male discourse about women and the passage of that discourse into ideology:

¹²⁴ Constance de Salm, *Oeuvres complètes de Madame la Princesse Constance de Salm*. Paris: Firmin Didot Frères & Arthus Bertrand, 1842, t.1, p.V. Constance de Salm revealed the original intent of this text in the preface to her *Oeuvres complètes*: "On s'occupait vivement de la discussion sur les femmes auteurs, qui en est le sujet, et qui était en quelque sorte nouvelle ; elle éveillait tous les genres d'amour-propre, elle agitait, divisait même la société, et semblait porter l'esprit de parti jusque dans la littérature" (p.iii).

Dans tous les temps les hommes ont cherché à nous éloigner de l'étude et de la culture des beaux-arts; mais aujourd'hui cette opinion est devenue plus que jamais une espèce de mode.¹²⁵

Constance de Salm clearly opposes the ideology or the patriarchal discourse. She reassures men by explaining that women's fight for their rights does not mean a loss of rights for men.

J'ai eu pour objet, dans cette épître, que j'adresse aux femmes, de soutenir leurs droits sans nuire à ceux des hommes. (3)

However, stating that women's rights need to be defended constitutes an attack on the rigid patriarchal system unwilling to recognize the political plight of women. Furthermore, by explaining that asserting her sex in society does not necessarily entail depriving the other sex of its rights ("sans nuire [aux droits] des hommes,") she attempts to assuage the fears or concerns held by men.

In the *Epître aux femmes*, Constance de Salm adopts a vindictive tone and leaves no doubt about the political implication of the ideas that she advances. Through the use of the imperative and of the apostrophe ("Femmes, réveillez-vous,") she exhorts women to bring themselves out of their torpor and to end their subordination to men. She defines patriarchy

¹²⁵ Constance D. T. Pipelet, *Epître aux femmes* (Paris : Dessenne, 1797), 3.

as the target of her “transports” (“Je laisse enfin ma voix exprimer mes transports.”(Constance Pipelet, 5):

L’homme, injuste, jaloux de tout assujettir,
Sous la loi d’UPlus fort prétend nous asservir ;
Il feint, dans sa compagne et sa consolatrice,
De ne voir qu’un objet créé pour son caprice (...)
Il étouffe en nos cœurs le germe de la gloire ;
Il nous fait une loi de craindre la victoire ;
Pour exercer en paix un empire absolu (...) ¹²⁶
Mais ce n’est pas assez pour son esprit jaloux,
C’est la soumission qu’il exige de nous... (6-7)

Constance de Salm then enumerates several elements of the patriarchal discourse that women’s subordination is based on and vehemently attacks them. For instance, she undermines the argument so often used by male patriarchal discourse in the eighteenth century that women’s subordination is based on nature:

Voyons-nous, dans nos bois, nos vallons, nos montagnes,]
Les lions furieux outrager leurs compagnes ?
Voyons-nous dans les airs l’aigle dominateur
De l’aigle qu’il chérit réprimer la grandeur ?
Non; tous suivent en paix l’instinct de la nature.
L’homme seul est tyran; l’homme seul est parjure. (7)

¹²⁶ In her *Oeuvres complètes*, Constance de Salm changed these lines to «Il étouffe en nos cœurs la fierté, le courage; /Il nous fait une loi de supporter l’outrage ». o.c. p.7

The words “tyran” and “parjure”, in addition to being highly negative, entail a moral judgment on men: man is guilty for acting against nature and for doing so intentionally. Man is aware that he is violating nature. His actions are motivated by selfish reason, that is to maintain control over women.

Later in the text, she again identifies clearly the patriarchal ideology through men’s intent (“Autoriser en vain l’effort du despotisme” and “Et du plus ou du moins inférer sans appel/ Que sa femme lui doit un respect éternel”), as well as different types of discourses (moral and scientific) used by men to implement it:

Laissez le *moraliste*, employant le sophisme,
Autoriser en vain l’effort du despotisme;
Laissez-le, tourmenteur des mots insidieux,
Dégrader notre sexe et vanter nos beaux yeux;
Laissons l’anatomisme, aveugle en sa science,
D’une fibre avec art calculer la puissance,
Et dUPlus ou du moins inférer sans appel,
Que sa femme lui doit un respect éternel. (11)

Salm judges men severely by identifying the patriarchal ideology and attacking their methods. Thus, the moralist becomes a “tourmenteur de mots insidieux.” In contrast with true philosophers situating their discourse in logic, the moralist uses rhetoric to please misogynists (“Dégrader notre sexe”) and to seduce women, reducing them to their

bodies (“vanter nos beaux yeux”). By doing so, according to Salm, man creates a double discourse appealing to ethos and pathos but not reflecting the real moral truth. Like sophists, the moralist here uses rhetoric to assert his preconceived position, opposing Platonic and philosophical traditions for which language is a means to reach truth.

Salm deconstructs the figure of the scientist in a similar way. She undermines the anatomist – and with him the entire medical profession – whose research, as we saw in the first chapter, was used to justify the inferiority of woman’s nature and therefore her exclusion from the public sphere. In her eyes, the anatomist loses the right to be called a scientist because of the ignorance of his own subject, the methodology used as well as that he steps outside his field of research. Salm condemns the fact that the anatomist, like the “tourmenteur de mots insidieux,” uses a reversed approach.¹²⁷ She accuses him of not drawing his conclusions from rigorously scientific observations, but instead using science as justification (“inférer”) of a pre-conceived patriarchal theory. The conclusions drawn from this patriarchal approach are not scientific because they do not leave any room for refutation (“sans appel”). She then understates the scientific nature of the work undertaken by the anatomist by simplifying it to a

¹²⁷ The scientific methodology can be divided into two major approaches: 1) the logical approach, or the elaboration of theories through research, theoretical thinking or observation, 2) the reversed approach, that is the justification of theories, the theory coming first and the scientific work second.

basic mathematical terminology (“calculer la puissance/ Et du plus et du moins”). Salm further undermines such supposedly scientific conclusions by reinforcing the gap existing between the man of science (anatomist), the inappropriate methods used, and the unrelated conclusion, i.e. woman’s domesticity. For Salm, the anatomist (and with him the medical body) steps out of his role when he endorsed social and moral beliefs, defeating by the same token the purpose of science (the pursuit of scientific knowledge).

Salm invites women to ignore discourse limiting women’s role and place: “Ah! détournons les yeux de cet affreux tableau!”¹²⁸ and exhorts them to assert their rightful place, which they have been denied, within the sphere of arts and literature: “O femmes, reprenez la plume et le pinceau” (11). This appeal to women is an echo of and a revolt against men’s discourse: “On s’étonne, on murmure, on s’agite, on menace/ On veut nous arracher la plume et le pinceau” (10). Therefore, every woman who tries to establish herself in literature or art de facto battles against patriarchy. Constance de Salm, like Germaine de Staël, states that genius is genderless (“Et [la nature], dédaignant les mots de sexe et d’apparence,/ Pèse dans sa grandeur les dons qu’elle dispense”) (11) and therefore women’s place in arts and literature as equal to men’s is justified.

She then repeats the idea of man going against nature. However, man no longer has the advantage when nature takes over:

La nature a des droits qu'il ignore lui-même;
On ne la courbe pas sous le poids d'un système (11)

The first part of the *Epître* deconstructs men's discourse justifying woman's expulsion from the public sphere. This leads to the second part which addresses the discourse of domesticity. Constance de Salm denounces the fact that, under false pretences and appealing to women's maternal feelings, patriarchal discourse uses motherhood to justify woman's "natural" imprisonment within the domestic sphere:

Mais quel nouveau transport! Quel changement soudain ;
Armé du sentiment l'homme paroît enfin ;
Il nous crie: « Arrêtez, femmes, vous êtes mères!
« A tout autre plaisir rendez-vous étrangères;
« De l'étude et des arts la douce volupté
« Deviendrait un larcin à la maternité! (11-12)

She refutes men's claims and accuses them of intentionally disregarding the mother's devotion to her children through a series of rhetorical questions and the anaphora:

L'ingrat est-il aveugle ou bien feint-il de l'être ?
Feint-il de ne pas voir qu'en ces premiers instants
Où le ciel à nos vœux accorde des enfants,

¹²⁸ Constance D.T. Pipelet, *Epître aux femmes*, 11

Tout entières aux soins que leur âge réclame,
Tout ce qui n'est pas eux ne peut rien sur notre âme?
Feint-il de ne pas voir que de nouveaux besoins
Nous imposent bientôt de plus glorieux soins,
Et que pour diriger une enfance timide
Il faut être à la fois son modèle et son guide? (12)

Salm also takes on men's discourse which limits women's role to that of a mother, therefore containing them within the domestic sphere. She calls attention to the patriarchal flawed logic and reminds men of the obvious evidence: if women are mothers, men are fathers, and therefore their place within the domestic sphere is as justified as women's:

Disons tout. En criant, *Femmes, vous êtes mères!*
Cruels! Vous oubliez que les hommes sont pères;
Que les charges, les soins, sont partagés entre eux;
Que le fils qui vous naît appartient à tous deux;
Et qu'après les moments de la première enfance
Vous devez plus que nous soigner son existence? (12)

Both, men and women, or rather mother and father, should share an equal role and responsibility in bringing up children. For Constance de Salm, the domestic sphere is not defined by motherhood, but rather by parenthood, thus eliminating the separation between public sphere and domestic sphere according to sex. Salm then reasserts man's natural place in the domestic sphere: what is considered a natural separation of both

spheres, or rather a social separation based on *natural* distinctions between man and woman, as well as the emphasis on the mother's role is indeed possible only because women, unlike men, never estranged themselves from their parental function. If such a thing were to happen, men would cease to be social *men* and fulfill their natural function as father:

Ah! s'il étoit possible (et le fût-il jamais?)
Qu'une mère un instant suspendit ses bienfaits
Un cri de son enfant dans son ame attendrie
Réveilleroit bientôt la nature assoupie. (12)

In the following lines, Constance de Salm continues to blur the lines separating public and domestic spheres:

Mais l'homme, tourmenté par tant de passions,
Accablé sous le poids de ses dissensions,
Malgré lui, malgré nous, à chaque instant oublie,
Qu'il doit plus que son cœur à qui lui doit la vie,
Et que d'un vain sermon les stériles éclats
Des devoirs paternels ne l'acquitteront pas. (13)

Showing some understanding for man's social behavior for which he is not always responsible, Salm acknowledges the difficulty of man's condition. In a sense, he too is a victim of a social construct ("tourmenté," "accablé," "malgré lui," "sous le poids," "ses dissensions"). Yet, she reminds him of his duties, civic (toward women) and domestic (toward

his children). By stating that man owes woman *more than* feelings or filial love (“*plus que son coeur,*” my emphasis), Salm reinforces the need for woman’s social and political recognition by men. Such recognition would allow for women’s presence in the public sphere. However, enabling women to access public sphere is only part of man’s responsibilities. His other duty is toward himself, that is, accepting his domestic role as a father. In order to do so, he first has to realize that no discourse can justify the sacrifice of his paternal role for a public existence, for there is indeed no choice to be made: he cannot be *freed* from (or “acquitted” of) his paternal role.

Salm uses the same technique to define man as the one used by the patriarchal discourse to define woman. A woman is defined as a daughter, mother and wife. In these verses and in the following stanza, man is considered under the same categories, that is to say as a son, father, and husband. Salm shows that, when it comes to how man envisions the nature of his relationship to his wife, he is indeed mistaken:

Insensés! Vous voulez une femme ignorante;
Eh bien! soit; confondez l’épouse et la servante (13)

For Salm, the man who willingly keeps his spouse in the dark, uneducated, chained to his authority, or in other words in a permanent state of inferiority, is indeed a mad man: a man who has lost his sense

("insensés") and lives an illusion ("confondez"). Such an individual is mistaken because, as Constance de Salm shows, marriage does not equal servitude. By stating "confondez l'épouse et la servante," she actually gives a definition to the marital relationship that goes against the patriarchal ideology: if servitude is defined by a relation dominator/dominated (or master/servant), marriage, on the other hand, ought to be based on a relationship between equals.

We can understand the frustration and the anger of the feminine narrative voice present in these two lines, through the combination of the accelerated rhythm resulting from the short phrases ("Insensés!", "Eh bien!" "soit"), the interjection, the imperative form, and the exclamatory tone. According to Salm, or rather the idealized narrator, men perpetrating women's servitude in lieu of marriage, ought to be looked down at and disgraced:

Rougissez de montrer votre femme et vos fils;
(...)Traînez ailleurs vos jours et votre obscurité;
On ne vous plaindra pas, vous l'aurez mérité. (13)

However, this frustration and anger are quickly replaced by the serene and idealized image of a family who owes its happiness (including that of the husband) to a man who, by contrast, has not repeated the mistake of his forefathers:

Regardons maintenant celui dont l'ame grande

Cherche dans sa compagne un être qui l'entende;
Regardons-les tous deux ajouter tour-à-tour
Le charme des talents au charme de l'amour.
Qu'un tel homme est heureux au sein de sa famille! (13)

Man's place and responsibilities, like woman's, are first to his family.

In her attempt to assert a woman's right to be in the public sphere, Constance de Salm does not intend to deny women their domestic role.

Like many other women, she believes in domesticity:

Ne croyez pas pourtant, épouses, mères, filles,
Que je veuille jeter le trouble en vos familles,
D'une ardeur de révolte embrasser vos esprits,
Et renverser des lois que moi-mêmes je suis ?
Il est des nœuds sacrés et d'honorables chaînes;
Il est de doux plaisirs et de plus douces peines;
Et cet échange heureux des soins de deux époux
Fait leur bien mutuel et le charme de tous.
C'est l'ordre qui m'irrite, et non pas la prière;
C'est l'ordre que repousse une âme haute et fière (14)

In the *Epître aux femmes*, Salm did not intend to undermine women's domestic role as mother or wife, for she values the two pillars of domesticity, marriage and motherhood. She favors what she would call three decades later the "bonheur domestique".¹²⁹ She nonetheless

¹²⁹ Salm uses the expression "bonheur domestique" in *Epître sur l'esprit et l'aveuglement du siècle* written in 1828 (Œuvres, t.1, p.133).

challenges the patriarchal discourse. Advocating women's right to publicity, she questions domesticity resulting in the enslavement of mothers and wives, and the inflexible boundaries drawn between public and domestic spheres according to the sexes.

While *Epître aux femmes* provides an attack on patriarchy, Constance de Salm's position is further seen in several other texts, for example the *Rapport sur un ouvrage du Citoyen Theremin intitulé "De la condition des femmes dans une république"*, in 1800. In this text Salm highlights three aspects. First, she criticizes the paradox in men's logic that gives women some rights and duties but are unable to pass beyond stereotypes to grant them full citizenship. Then she shows how the nation would benefit if women were to become equal to men and citizens of the Republic. Finally, she lists the duties of the nation toward women (and young girls) such as education. She concludes by refuting men's argument according to which women would neglect the domestic realm by accessing the public sphere.

In February 1810, she published an important poem, the *Epître adressée à l'Empereur Napoléon*, in reaction to two articles voted by the Conseil d'Etat in the *Code penal* (articles 324 and 329). Her text is a direct attack on the patriarchal legal discourse against women.

It is important to quote the two article

In 1804, the *Code Civil*, known as the *Code Napoléon* after its instigator, relegated woman only to the domestic sphere and bound their existence to decisions of their fathers and husbands in every aspect of their lives. Women became permanent minors and had no more rights than criminals or the insane. The *Code Napoléon*, more than measures taken against women during the Revolution, rendered the most effective and detrimental blow to women's presence in the public sphere. On February 12, 1810, the Conseil d'Etat accepted the *Code pénal*, or *Code impérial*, in which women's inferiority and unequal status before the law was further codified.

In the *Code pénal*, two articles raised Constance de Salm's indignation, as well as the indignation of many other women: no. 324, which forgave men who murder their adulterous wives and article 339 which limited the punitive sanctions against adultery men to a fine whereas adulterous women were jailed.¹³⁰ Although Salm is outraged by both articles, article 324 and 339, her text mostly concentrates on the consequences of the first one.

¹³⁰ The two articles in question are as follows: Art.324 "Le meurtre commis par l'époux sur l'épouse, oUPar celle-ci sur son époux, n'est pas excusable, si la vie de l'époux ou de l'épouse qui a commis le meurtre a eu lieu. Néanmoins, dans le cas de l'adultère, prévUPar l'art.336, le meurtre commis par l'époux (Salm's emphasis) sur son épouse, ainsi que sur le complice, à l'instant où il les surprend en flagrant délit dans la maison conjugale, est excusable."

Art. 339 "Le mari qui aura entretenu une concubine dans la maison conjugale, et qui aura été convaincu sur la plainte de la femme, sera puni d'une amende de cent francs à deux mille francs." (Salm's emphasis). Qtd in Constance de Salm, *Ceuvres complètes*, p.307-308.

In the eighty-four lines addressed directly to the Emperor, Constance de Salm denounces a penal code which, instead of attacking crime, encourages it and protects its perpetrators:

Un code, effroi du crime, en devienne complice
Que l'époux meurtrier échappe à sa justice;
Qu'il donne à sa fureur le droit d'ôter le jour
A deux faibles amants égarés par amour? ... ¹³¹

Salm challenges the idea that the husband can be absolved by establishing the need to distinguish between the husband who, hurt, in a moment of insanity and having lost control over himself, kills the adulterous couple, and the man who uses his wife's adultery as pretext to commit an unforgivable crime. Such a distinction is not made in the law:

Ce n'est plus cet époux qu'a transporté l'outrage,
C'est un acte cruel, sans honneur, sans courage,
De celle dont la loi le rend protecteur,
Calculant le trépas en permettant l'erreur. (126)

Far from serving man's interest, excusing such a crime is indeed shameful and demeaning, for it deprives him of his most valuable qualities, honor and courage. But foremost, it would alter marital relationships, arousing paranoia and fear, and it could open the door to unspeakable but nonetheless legalized behavior:

Un frénétique époux, aveuglé par sa rage,
Dans chaque homme verra le rival qui l'outrage.
Sûr de l'impunité, ses soupçons, ses discours,
De son épouse en pleurs désoleront les jours:
En elle du trépas légitime crainte
Fera naître l'effroi, le désordre, la plainte,
Et par les lois enfin l'hymen ensanglanté
Verra fuir à jamais l'amour épouvanté. (228-229)

In this article, Salm also demonstrates how man's contradictory ideas are indeed the cause of a double-standard in rendering justice:

Comment, ce qui de l'un rend la mort légitime,
Pour l'autre, aux yeux des lois, cesse d'être un crime?

and the cause of a moral double-standard:

De quel droit un époux, notre premier appui,
Veut-il punir en nous ce qu'il excuse en lui ? (227)

In the first part of the *Epître*, Salm expresses her indignation regarding the patriarchal discourse not only by her choice of words but also by using the interrogative form as the structure for every sentence. The first half of this text is indeed a succession of rhetorical questions.

¹³¹ Constance de Salm, *Epître adressée à l'Empereur Napoléon*, in *Œuvres complètes*, t.1, p.226.

In the second part, after having established the lack of logic and the partiality of the patriarchal discourse, Salm resumes her attack on the patriarchal ideology with a more assertive tone:

Que l'homme ait son pouvoir, que la femme ait ses droits,
C'est pour le faible aussi que sont faites les lois! (229)

This last verse, which provides the epigraph to the text, sums up to some extent Salm's appeal to Napoleon, reminding him that in order to have a true state based on law the law cannot simply be the emanation of the power of the strong. It also has to protect the weak. Otherwise, the Revolution, which Salm welcomed, failed, and Napoleonic society, like that of the Ancien régime, "consacre l'arbitraire" (227). Even though Napoleon, who, after reading the text, allegedly agreed with the validity of Constance de Salm's objections, the law was not changed and remained in effect.¹³²

D. Chapter conclusion.

In spite of the legal measures limiting a woman's presence in the public sphere, women managed to retain a limited degree of visibility

¹³² Constance de Salm, *Oeuvres complètes*, t.1, p.308. According to Constance de Salm's own notes, the Emperor read the text that she had given him and agreed with her: "Lorsque ces deux articles furent adoptés, ils devinrent, dans la société, le sujet de beaucoup de discussions, ce qui m'inspira cette Epître à l'Empereur, que je fis en peu d'heures, et que je lui adressai à l'instant. Il trouva mes réclamations justes ; car, quelques jours après, dans un de ces cercles qui avaient lieu deux fois par semaine aux Tuileries, il vint à moi, et me dit : « J'ai lu vos vers; vous avez raison ; c'est bien, très-bien. » Je sus aussi que dans le même temps, il avait dit à plusieurs reprises, dans une des séances du conseil d'Etat, en parlant de ces articles, que les femmes s'en plaignaient, et qu'elles avaient raison."

during the second half of the Revolution. The decreasing participation of women in revolutionary events paralleled the people's diminishing participation. Access to the public sphere was gradually defined by pre-revolutionary social-economic conditions. Napoleon's accession to the throne, and with him the *Code civil* of 1804 and the *Code pénal* of 1810, marked the establishment and the codification of the woman's role as a domestic one and the end of the public presence of women of the poorest classes.

The overt subversion of the patriarchal discourse became the prerogative of a few strong women, among whom Germaine de Staël who had much in common with Constance de Salm. However, most women writers who challenged the patriarchal discourse, chose a more subtle approach. It would be impossible to list all the names and works of women who published and challenged the patriarchal discourse. We could, however, mention some of the more important women: de Genlis, de Cottin, de Charrière, de Souza, de Guizot, and Félicité de Choiseul-Meuse and add some less well known, such as Mme Gottis, Mme de Gautier and Mme Malles. More women were publishing than before the Revolution, some of them prolifically like Mme de Genlis. The sole fact that women published constituted for Constance de Salm an attack against the patriarchy. The decision to write and publish one's memoirs, as well as women's progressive choice of sentimental novels over the

more masculine romantic and then realist genres as it is shown in Margaret Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* can be seen as women's attempt to write against literary culture dominated by men.¹³³

¹³³ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

During the French Revolution, women showed that they were not merely domestic beings but also political ones. Although they failed to achieve full citizenship, they nonetheless succeeded in making themselves known as active participants in the most important events of France's history and asserted themselves despite attempts by the patriarchy to disempower them .

The question of women's relation to the public sphere is a difficult one. Madelyn Gutwirth, Patricia Spacks, Olwen Hufton, Lynn Hunt, and Joan Landes, to name a few, emphasize women's exclusion from the public sphere and underscore the conditions limiting their participation to the body politic. Gutwirth situates the problem within a wider socio-historical and intellectual context. She highlights differences among women within social castes at the end of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, there were high-society women whose role in salons (the *salonnières*) was to turn into a more domestic one (changes which she attributes to the success of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*); on the other hand, there were lower-class women, rural and urban alike, who "still lived (...)

within the little-altered folk traditions of rustic subordination".¹³⁴ Gutwirth mentions the precariousness of woman. Indeed, men attacked what was at that time considered the very essence of women: maternity, motherhood. As we saw in chapter 2, the domestic discourse as it was developed by Rousseau was detrimental to woman's emancipation. In my attempt to reconstruct several crucial aspects of the patriarchal ideology on woman's nature and place, I have looked at the legal, scientific, medical and intellectual discourses of the time and I have shown that not only they influenced but also contributed to promote Rousseau's ideas on domesticity.

Other scholars have focused on specific examples or aspects illustrating women's presence and active participation in the public sphere throughout the eighteenth century. Thus, English Showalter Jr. sheds light on women dramatists during the Ancien Régime. Gaudineau provides important information on women's active participation in the Revolution. Carla Hesse, along with Dena Goodman and Katherine Kittredge have focused on women's participation as authors in the public sphere during the Revolution. Considering the increasing number of publications by women and the number of women authoring publicized texts, Carla Hesse shows a feminine presence within the public sphere, that is within the body politic and the intellectual realm. In *Reading*

¹³⁴ Madelyn Gutwirth, "Civil Rights and the Wrongs of Women," in *A New History of*

Signature, Carla Hesse echoes the idea previously held in *The Other Enlightenment* according to which “laws rarely offer an accurate reflection of the social life they are intended to order” (476). Consequent to this idea, one might conclude that the patriarchal discourse on women’s belonging to the home and gender-based distinctions between public and private spheres, although it clearly shows a misogynistic rhetoric, does not necessarily reflect a social reality. This is precisely one of the goals of my dissertation.

Women’s participation and political involvement in the French Revolution challenged the patriarchal ideology. In chapter 2, I reconstructed various aspects of the hegemonic discourse during the Ancien Régime. I attempted to establish what it exactly entails by looking at some crucial texts such as Rousseau’s *Emile* but also other important writings ignored by feminist critics today, such as *Les Lois civiles dans leur ordre naturel* by Jean Domat and *Les Lois ecclésiastiques de France dans leur ordre naturel* by Louis de Héricourt for the legal discourse, or scientific writings by Roussel, Lignac, Venel and Robert, and literary works such as Coyer’s *Bagatelles morales*. Women’s inferiority in status and right was inscribed in the legal, scientific, medical and intellectual discourses. Yet, we saw in the subsequent chapters that women challenged and subverted the patriarchal discourse during the Revolution and in the early years of

French Literature, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994), 563.

the Empire, and some even became public figures. In this work, I am not denying the importance of the patriarchal ideology. I am not claiming that women had equal access to publicity nor that they did not encounter difficulties in reaching the public sphere. Nonetheless, unlike Joan Landes and Lynn Hunt, I have argued that it was not during the Revolution that women were relegated to a voiceless domestic sphere, due to men's efforts to reduce women's visibility and involvement in the revolutionary activities or as a consequence of the bourgeois domestic ideology. On the other hand focusing, like Carla Hesse, on women's publications or their access to the public sphere is to adopt an optimistic view and to undermine measures that were taken against women as well as the struggle that they encountered in participating in the Revolution. Many women, despite of all the measures taken to ensure that they remained in the domestic realm, overtly fought for their rights as well as for the ideals of the Revolution, therefore challenging and subverting the patriarchal hegemony and accessing a certain level of publicity. I have selected two of them in particular and looked into the collective involvement of women in the revolutionary period. To assert that women were excluded from the public sphere and relegated to domesticity is to ignore women's important role in the Revolution.

Government denied de Gouges and other women any political standing or representation, "denied" not only in the sense of refusal to

grant, but also refusal to recognize. Recognition is only possible when there is already existence. The denial of women's access to the public sphere during the Revolution does not equal an absolute absence from and lack of participation in it.

We saw that when it comes to women and their relation to the public sphere, there exist two lines of thinking, both drawn from a feminist perspective : on the one hand, repression and exclusion, on the other, emphasis on a presence and even active participation.

Considering both the number of women authors and the extent of their publications, Carla Hesse argues that women were not excluded from the public sphere defined as visibility via print culture. Following in Hesse's footsteps, this dissertation is partly an attempt to show women's presence in the public sphere without, however, denying an excessively difficult access to it. We have looked not only at women's actions but also at the existence of a non-negligible women's authorship during and after the French Revolution and, in particular, that of two women, Olympe de Gouges and Constance de Salm.

Examining selected historical and critical literature centering on woman's place, function, role and participation before, during, and just after the French Revolution, shows that we cannot really assert women's exclusion or presence in the public sphere as a fact. The question of exclusion or non exclusion of women from the public sphere is, it seems to

me, aporic in the sense that the answer is subject to individual interpretation rather than to factual interpretation. The answer to this question will always depend on the perspective adopted by the individual considering the facts presented to him/her. To some extent, it is the perpetual question of knowing whether the glass is half-empty or half-full.

Regardless of the position adopted, one can be faced with the facts. First, there was a pervasive patriarchal discourse that adopted an anti-feministic rhetoric. Secondly, the domestic discourse ascribed women's containment in the house and prescribed them from participating in the public sphere. Thirdly, women were guillotined for their political stands, but so were men and in a greater number than women.¹³⁵ Women without particular political opinion who did not threaten the patriarchy were also sent to the scaffold only because of what they were and represented, that is member of the aristocracy and of the dominant class of the Ancien Régime. Then, women were denied political rights, including the right to vote, but so were most men; in fact, the vast majority of men was excluded from the electoral process: voting and political representation were indeed limited by economic criteria. Finally, there were legal measures taken by the new male governing class to permanently remove women from the public sphere. However, does this mean that men succeeded in their

attempt? No. It shows however that women were active, so active indeed that legal measures were required. After 1794, women were not so visible as before. But visibility does not undermine publicity.

One must also note that, paradoxically, the legal measures that aim to maintain women in a submissive domestic role, therefore forbidding them access to the public sphere were not voted in the most bloody, unruly and chaotic period of the Revolution, that is the Terror. Indeed, such measures were taken only after Robespierre's and the Jacobins' fall, only once the Terror had ended.

Other factors also ought to be taken into consideration when looking at women's publicity. More women published during the Revolution than in the preceding period. Finally, women who published during the Revolution were not exclusively from the nobility or high bourgeoisie. If they constituted the greater number of women authors, some women from middle- and even lower-classes came to authorship. If not as individuals, they did so collectively through the "cahiers de doléances", numerous pamphlets, and collective addresses to the Assemblée. They adopted the Phrygian hat and the tricolor cocarde, took arms, even wore the uniform; they also re-appropriated a voice of their own and for themselves by re-appropriating the phallic pen. One of the goals of this dissertation was to give examples of such women and to

¹³⁵ As shown by Carla Hesse in *The Other Enlightenment*, women had more opportunities

examine how, through some of their texts dealing with aspects of the Revolution, they subverted the patriarchal discourse.

During the first period of the Revolution (1789-93), the triumph of the ideas of the Enlightenment enabled a vertical reformation of society by abolishing feudalistic subordination, opening participation in the public spheres to a broader constituency. Women profited from the confusion and the early triumph of the Enlightenment to include themselves. Men and women of all classes participated in the Revolution or counter-revolution, posturing themselves politically and publicly. The patriarchal discourse was prompt to reaffirm legal dispositions not so much to exclude women from the public sphere as to reaffirm women's dependency on (or subordination to) men.

The limitations of this dissertation have precluded discussion of other meritorious women, such as Louise de Kéralio-Robert and Félicité de Choisel-Meuse (or at least not deservedly enough). Although we have briefly mentioned Louise de Kéralio-Robert, she deserves better consideration and recognition. She is an example of a woman participating in the public sphere and commenting on the ongoing political debate and events without being stopped because of her sex. Despite the recently proclaimed freedom of thoughts and press and the fact that unmarried women over the age of twenty-five, the age of

to escape the guillotine than men.

majority, were free to publish, Louise de Kéralio's intent to establish and lead a publishing house, the *Imprimerie Nationale du District des Filles de Saint Thomas*, was denied because, when it came to gender, only widows of publishers were allowed to take over their husband's business. She subverted this aspect of the patriarchal discourse by entering into a partnership with her father and her husband to create the *Mercure national, ou Journal de l'état et du citoyen* which first appeared in December 1789. Once married to Louis Robert, her work became contingent to her husband's decision. She nevertheless managed to maintain her independence throughout her journalistic career, which was cut short when they had to flee to Belgium in 1795 where she remained even after her separation from her husband, working as a grocer until she died in 1831.

We also ought to mention Félicité de Choiseul-Meuse, author of *Julie, ou J'ai sauvé ma rose* published in 1807, *Amélie de Saint-Far, ou La Fatale erreur* (1808), and *Entre Chien et Loup* (1809). As seen in this dissertation, women's claims were not limited to becoming equal to men in rights and status, but also open to the need to define their sex, to become "feminine." Because of the *Code Civil*, woman was reduced to mere object at the disposal of man. As seen in the second chapter of this dissertation, woman's sexuality was viewed as negative and as the origin of all evil: "Perhaps in response, female sexuality became loaded with menace and

female chastity an obsession, (...) Women's sexuality (...) corrupt." ¹³⁶ Yet, Choiseul-Meuse published erotic novels in which the woman was in control of her own sexuality. Breaking conventional codes defining woman's sexuality as the means of man's access to his own sexual pleasure, Choiseul-Meuse presented female characters re-appropriating their bodies for their own pleasure, an idea that is still at the core of many feminist works, both in literature and in critical theories.

In my study, I have not been able to mention all women who acted in the public sphere; it was not my intent to do so. But we have seen how women of all classes managed to participate, in different ways. I would like to mention here the hapless Queen of France. In his unpublished memoirs, Charles-Louis-François de Paule de Barentin, the last keeper of the seals under the Ancien Régime, underscores the importance of Marie-Antoinette's presence in committee meetings at the highest levels. She attended diligently and intelligently discussed the role of the "parlements", made every effort to have horrible laws repealed that authorized certain forms of torture in the questioning of the suspects, and wielded in general significant political power just prior to and during the early stage of the Revolution.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Madelyn Gutwirth, "Civil Rights and the Wrongs of Women," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994), 561-2.

¹³⁷ Barentin's *Mémoires* were recently sold at auction. See Thierry Bodin's long description of the nearly 1000 folio-sized pages that comprises this important historical document in [PIASA: Ventes aux enchères... Lettres et manuscrits autographes, documents](#)

We could also mention the involvement of foreign women in the political debate during the revolutionary period. While many French men and women were fleeing the turmoil of the French Revolution, some British women made a conscious decision to be in the midst of Revolutionary Paris. Mary Wollstonecraft crossed the English Channel in December 1792 to be part of radical changes which she had been longing for England. In 1794, while living in France, she wrote and published her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*. Others, like Helen Maria Williams who arrived in France during the summer of 1790, also commented profusely on the various events they witnessed. On the other side of the political spectrum, the royalist Grace Darlymple Elliott (1754-1823), who had moved from England to Paris in 1786 chose to face danger and stayed in France until the Peace of Amiens in 1801. She later wrote her *Journal of My Life during the French Revolution*.

The French Revolution provided women with an unprecedented opportunity to become involved in the public sphere, challenging the patriarchal discourse on woman's nature and domesticity without fully rejecting it. During the Revolution, women organized and took part in political societies and public activities. They wrote, rallied, demonstrated,

historiques... expert: Thierry Bodin, sale catalog, 6 and 7 March 2007, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, lot No. 360, p. 102-105. For the Queen, see Antonia Fraser's wonderful biography, *Marie-Antoinette: the Journey* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002); Fraser does not mention Barentin. If ever the latter's memoirs were published, they will shed new light on the Queen's participation in affairs of the state.

fought, and some even became soldiers. Attempts were made during the Revolution to marginalize and limit women's involvement in the political arena.

However, under Napoleon's leadership, women became simple objects of commodity and were stripped of any rights granted to them before and during the Revolution. Napoleon's *Code civil* and later his *Code pénal* were more detrimental to women's rights and to their hope for any political role than limitations imposed during the revolution, for they institutionalized women's subordination for over a century. To prevent women's unprecedented visibility and involvement in revolutionary activities from happening again, the patriarchy combined and strengthened its efforts to exclude women from the public sphere and relegated them to domesticity throughout the nineteenth century.

Appendix: Olympe de Gouges's works, chronological order and by genres :

Pre-revolutionary works:

Novels and other writings:

- *Mémoire de Madame de Valmont* (roman autobiographique, 1784)
- *Bienfaisante, ou La Bonne mère* (1788)
- *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres* (1788)

Drama:

- *Zamore et Mirza (L'Esclavage des Noirs), ou L'Heureux naufrages* (1784)
- *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin* (1784)
- *L'Homme généreux* (1786)
- *Le Philosophe corrigé, ou Le Cocu supposé* (1787)
- *Molière chez Ninon, ou Les Siècles des grands hommes* (1787)
- *La Bienfaisance récompense, ou La Vertu couronnée* (1788)

Pamphlets and Other Short Political Writings

- *Lettre à la Comédie-Française* (1785)
- *Réminiscence* (1786)
- *Lettre au Peuple ou le Projet d'une Caisse patriotique* (1788)
- *Remarques patriotiques* (1788)

Writings from 1789 to 1793:

Novels and Other Writings:

- *Le Prince philosophe* (1789)

Drama:

- *Le Couvent, ou Les Vœux forcés* (1790/92)
- *La Nécessité du divorce* (1790)

- *Mirabeau aux Champs-Élysées* (1791)
- *La France sauvée ou Le Tyran détrôné* (1792)
- *L'Entrée de Dumouriez à Bruxelles, ou Les Vivandiers* (1793)
- *Le Prélat d'autrefois, ou Sophie et Saint-Elme* (1794)

Pamphlets and Other Short Political Writings:

- *Dialogue allégorique entre la France et la Vérité* (1789)
- *Projet d'un second théâtre et d'une maternité* (1789)
- *Le Cri du sage. Par une femme* (1789)
- *Avis pressant, ou réponse à mes calomniateurs* (1789)
- *Pour sauver la Patrie, il faut respecter les Trois-Ordres* (1789)
- *Mes vœux sont remplis, ou le don patriotique* (1789)
- *Discours de l'aveugle aux Français* (1789)
- *Lettre à Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans* (1789)
- *Séance Royale* 1789)
- *L'Ordre national ou le Comte d'Artois* (1789)
- *Action héroïque d'une Française, ou La France sauvée par les femmes* (1789)
- *Lettre aux représentants de la Nation* (1789)
- *Le contre poison* (1789)
- *Réponse au Champion américain, ou Colon très aisé à connaître* (1790)
- *Lettre aux littérateurs français* (1790)
- *Départ de M. Necker et de Mme de Gouges* (1790)
- *Projet sur la formation d'un tribunal populaire et suprême en matière criminelle* (1790)
- *Bouquet National* (1790)
- *Le Tombeau de Mirabeau* (1790)
- *Préface pour les dames, ou Le Portrait des femmes* (1791)
- *Adresse au Roi, à la Reine, au Prince de Condé* (1791)
- *Sera-t-il Roi, ne le sera-t-il pas ?* (1791)

- *Observation sur les étrangers* (1791)
- *Repentir de Mme de Gouges* (1791)
- *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791)
- *Le bon sens du Français* (1792)
- *L'Esprit Français ou Promblème à résoudre sur le labyrinthe de divers complot* (1792)
- *Lettre aux Français* (1792)
- *Grande Eclipse* (1792)
- *Pacte national* (1792)
- *Lettre sur la mort de Gouvoion* (1792)
- *Le Cri de l'innocence* (1792)
- *La Fierté de l'innocence* (1792)
- *Les fantômes de l'opinion publique* (1792)
- *Réponse à la justification de Robespierre* (1792)
- *Pronostic sur M. Robespierre, par un animal amphibie* (1792)
- *Correspondance de la Cour* (1792)
- *Mon dernier mot à mes chers amis* (1792)
- *Olympe de Gouge, défenseur officieux de Louis Capet* (1792)
- *Adresse au Don Quichotte du Nord* (1792)
- *Avis pressant à la Convention, par une vraie républicaine* (1793)
- *Union, courage, surveillance, et la République sauvée* (1793)
- *Testament politique* (1793)
- *Les Trois urnes, ou le Salut de la Patrie par un voyageur aérien* (1793)
- *Olympe de Gouges au tribunal révolutionnaire* (1793)
- *Dernière lettre à mon fils* (1793)

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VITA

Rudy Frédéric Michel Adolphe de Mattos de Smet was born in Champigny sur Marne, Val de Marne, France on October 5, 1974, the son of Irène Aline de Smet and Raymond Joseph de Mattos. He attended the Lycée Clémenceau, Chantonnay, France and passed the Baccalauréat with honors in 1992. He then entered the “Hypokhâgne Classes Préparatoires aux Grands Ecoles de Fontenay Saint-Cloud” at Lycée Guist’hau in Nantes, France, in September 1992 before attending the University of Nantes. He received the degree of D.E.U.G (Diplôme d’Etudes Universitaires Générales) in L.L.C.E German-English-French (Literature Linguistic and Foreign Civilization) in 1996, then a *Licence* LLCE in German with honors in 1997 and a *Maîtrise* in German also with honors in 1999. During the Fall semester of 1996 and the Spring semester of 1997 he attended the University of Rostock, in Germany. From September 1993 to March 1996 and from September 1997 to May 1999 he was employed by the French Ministry of Education as a teaching assistant at the Lycée Alfred Kastler in La Roche sur Yon, Vendée, France. He arrived to the United States of America in May 1999 and married Corinne Adar Leyden, the mother of their son, Reece (2003), and their daughter, Chloé (2006). During school year 1999-2000, he was employed as a French teacher at Pacelli High School, Columbus, Georgia. In August 2000, he entered The Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin. He received a M.A. in French Literature in 2002. He was employed at the University of Texas at Austin from 2000 to 2005. He was hired as an Assistant Professor of French at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston in 2005.

Permanent Address: 901 Robert Street, Ruston, LA 71270

This Dissertation was typed by the author.