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SINCERITY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE WORK OF LOUISE D'ÉPINAY

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REBECCA ANN CRISAFULLI

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For my wonderful parents

Peter and Linda Crisafulli

In loving remembrance

Virginia L. Tatman

and

Dorothy J. Crisafulli

For my mentors, especially Joan Grimbert

For Katie and Kara

With thanks to The Two Martins

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	x
Introduction: Rebalancing Women Authors' Lives and Works.....	1
 <u>Part One: Questioning the Traditional Narrative about Louise d'Épinay and L'<i>Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant</i></u>	
Chapter One: Re-thinking Louise d'Épinay and L' <i>Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant</i> 's Place in Enlightenment Culture.....	23
Chapter Two: The Many Genres of <i>Montbrillant</i> .....	58
Chapter Three: <i>Montbrillant</i> 's Manuscript, Publication, and Reception History.....	80
 <u>Part Two: Reading <i>Montbrillant</i> as <i>Roman pédagogique</i></u>	
Chapter Four: Teaching and Learning by Example.....	114
Chapter Five: Mothers as Educators: The Example of Sévigné.....	133
Chapter Six: Reading <i>Montbrillant</i> as an Education in Sincerity.....	156
Chapter Seven: How <i>Montbrillant</i> Co-opts Forms of Catholic Spirituality to Teach Sincerity .	191
Chapter Eight: D'Épinay's Reforms for the Family and the State.....	213
 <u>Part Three: Re-reading <i>Montbrillant</i> in Context</u>	

Chapter Nine: <i>Montbrillant</i> : A New Chronology.....	241
Chapter Ten: <i>Montbrillant</i> and the <i>Miroir des princes</i> .....	267
Conclusion: D'Épinay's Legacies.....	284
Epilogue: A Long Tradition.....	303
Bibliography.....	324

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation, “Sincerity and Social Transformation in the Work of Louise d’Épinay,” analyzes one eighteenth-century French *philosophe*’s proposal to educate girls to be very sincere as a way of rectifying social injustices built into the economic and legal systems of *Ancien régime* France. Louise d’Épinay (1726-1783) was the author of a novel, educational works, a prodigious correspondence with leading Enlightenment thinkers, and contributions to the clandestine literary journal the *Correspondance littéraire*, read by European heads of state. Her work has now largely been forgotten, especially outside of France. I argue that many of d’Épinay’s proposals for changing French society have been overlooked until now because one of her major works, *L’Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, a nearly 2,000-page epistolary novel likely written over several years beginning in 1756, has been misread for over two centuries.

Critics have long considered *Montbrillant* a thinly-disguised and scandalous memoir. Through close reading and extensive study of the manuscripts of this work, I show that it is better understood as a *roman pédagogique* (or educational novel), according to the characteristics of the genre set forth by Robert Granderoute. Read as such, d’Épinay’s novel is just as much about pedagogy as those of her works traditionally classified as educational, *Les Lettres à mon fils*, written in 1756-1758, and *Les Conversations d’Émilie*, first published in 1774 and in an expanded edition first published in 1781. Read as a *roman pédagogique*, we can see that *Montbrillant* contains a curriculum for girls’ education that was radical for its time.

*Montbrillant* presents readers with the exemplary life of Émilie, a poor noble, whom readers follow through her adolescence and adulthood, through an unhappy and abusive marriage and financial struggles, through childbirth and the separation of her assets from those of her

husband; they witness her “mis-education” and discovery of the principles that will become the basis of her educational program when she becomes an educator in her own right.

As a poor noble, Émilie has difficulties meeting the dowry requirements of a noble suitor of old aristocratic stock and instead marries her cousin, a *fermier général* (or tax collector). Though wealthy, Monsieur de Montbrillant’s unrestrained spending and lack of empathy and foresight reduce his wife and children to poverty and thus leave Émilie’s daughter, Pauline, without marriage prospects and virtually no other options but to enter a convent, which, d’Épinay argues, should be reserved for those with a vocation. The challenge, then, is to find a way to get Pauline married to a gentleman who has noble values and can provide for her, even though she might not have a dowry. Émilie thinks the solution lies in the education she provides for Pauline; it will develop her character and intelligence, and these qualities, and her sincerity especially, will be worth much more than the missing dowry.

Based on intensive reading, writing, conversation, and introspection, d’Épinay’s educational curriculum reinvents for the Enlightenment a philosophical tradition we can trace back to the seventeenth century and the great French letter-writer Madame de Sévigné. D’Épinay thought girls were as capable as boys of using reason, reading and writing, learning from direct experience, and grappling with abstract concepts. Moreover, she thought girls *must* learn to do all of these things, both for their own happiness and that of their future husbands, as she championed a new type of companionate marriage based on intellectual and moral compatibility between two spouses rather than the size of the woman’s dowry. *Montbrillant* also offers practical guidance for its female readers by including examples of legal documents such as a separation of assets and a marriage contract, as well as scenes that illustrate how women can maximize their economic and legal agency within the framework of a system that is structurally

biased against them. D'Épinay rejected conventional educational methods – sending girls off to a convent and boys to a *collège* with a *précepteur* – and she shows mothers ways they can teach their children at home in order to prepare them for this new type of marriage. D'Épinay shows women readers that it is necessary that they teach their children themselves and shows them how they can secure the right to do so and how to teach effectively. Above all, d'Épinay advocates teaching girls to be very sincere. She believes that not only will their sincerity be worth more than a dowry to those worthy men capable of recognizing it, it is also the quality that, more than any other, will transform marriage from an unequal, often abusive hierarchy into a partnership of equals, and that will allow women to acknowledge their common oppression. My reading shows that d'Épinay's educational curriculum was meant not only to change the foundations of the family but also to transform a corrupt state nonviolently, an alternative to revolution.

Part One of this study explores the educational preoccupations that we can trace throughout d'Épinay's career and argues that although it has been classified almost exclusively as a memoir or autobiographical novel for the last two hundred years, *Montbrillant* actually displays the formal characteristics of many genres. This section also explains that *Montbrillant* came to be labeled as autobiographical because nineteenth-century editors, eager to make a profit from the revelations *Montbrillant* is thought to contain about famous men, transformed the text into a memoir. Modern editions and criticism bear the marks of this purposeful deformation.

Part Two presents a reading of *Montbrillant* as *roman pédagogique*, showing how educational aims are central to the novel's very construction. Critics have long presumed that d'Épinay got the majority of her educational ideas from her well-known contemporary Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I show that while d'Épinay did consult her contemporaries, she also drew inspiration from her seventeenth-century predecessor Mme de Sévigné. Sévigné and d'Épinay



both form part of a network of women looking to other women for reflections on education, particularly women's education. In examining d'Épinay's intellectual and moral curriculum in detail, I show that she planned to inculcate sincerity using forms of Catholic spirituality, stripped of their religious content, including a daily examination of conscience and reliance on a secular "spiritual" director for guidance. Finally, Part Two explains how d'Épinay's proposals for changing education, in particular the education of girls, would have had the potential to transform the State nonviolently, starting from the level of the individual family unit.

Part Three reinscribes *Montbrillant*, newly understood as *roman pédagogique*, back into its context, and argues that the work may have been conceived of and written earlier than critics think and that it can be seen as a response to Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and a source of inspiration for *Émile, ou de l'éducation*. This section also shows that, along with 1755 essays by d'Épinay's lover and longtime literary collaborator, Friedrich Melchior Grimm, then-editor of the *Correspondance littéraire*, and d'Épinay's *Lettres à mon fils*, d'Épinay's *Montbrillant* must in last analysis be understood as part of a larger project intended to broadcast a new form of education – based on a secular catechism centered on the love of virtue and truth – among the *CL*'s readership of European *élites* who could promote it in their states.

My analysis stresses the seminal importance of d'Épinay's educational theories, no longer relegated to the shadows of her more famous contemporary, Rousseau, but instead revealed as a radically innovative educational curriculum meant to help women work around the constraints of the existing marriage system and, ultimately, to change that system. D'Épinay's proposals make hers one of the most important feminist voices of her era, and my work provides an alternative literary history and a new understanding of Enlightenment culture and women's contributions to it.

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## Introduction: Rebalancing Women Authors' Lives and Works

### Fashion and Liaisons: Remembering a Woman Philosopher and Writer

I first heard the name Madame d'Épinay when I was enrolled in the now-defunct Advanced Placement French Literature program in high school. When we got to the eighteenth century, we studied *Candide* and some shorter works, and my teacher gave us supplemental information and excerpts to let us know about the things we could not read in their entirety. We learned about Rousseau, of course, and *Émile*. I especially liked the *philosophes*, because they were searching for ways to go on living in the face of evil, misfortune, and death, and ways to live ethically and to improve society. One day my teacher slipped a fresh transparency on the overhead and began telling us about *les épistolières* and *les salons*. Written on it were names: Mme de Tencin, Mme Geoffrin, Mme du Deffand, Mlle de Lespinasse, Mme d'Épinay. I pictured them all wearing voluminous gowns and Marie-Antoinette wigs, sitting around talking. I pictured the thousands of pages of letters they had probably written. I imagined these would be full of everyday minutia and the entertaining idiosyncrasies of members of their circle. My teacher said that these women were at the center of salons, where ideas were discussed, and I understood that they would therefore have some ideas, too, but that is not how I thought of them. To me, the men had ideas; the ladies had gossip and big hair.

When, years later, I went back to school for my Ph.D., I was taking a seminar on Rousseau's *Confessions*. My professor called all the graduate students up to his seat after the first class and told us he had a special project for us: to read a nearly 2,000-page novel by Mme d'Épinay called *L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, which had been understudied up until then. One of d'Épinay's most important works, for over two centuries, *Montbrillant* had been read primarily as a thinly-veiled memoir or autobiographical novel by editors, critics, and the

public, and its primary interest had been the author's real-life relationships with famous men like Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire. I understood that *Montbrillant* was above all a type of memoir. There would be arguments in it, I thought, a worldview, but it would not, strictly speaking, be about Ideas. In undertaking this project, I envisioned that I would be reading *Montbrillant* in order to put it into dialogue with Rousseau's autobiographical *Confessions*, in which he describes his famous quarrel with d'Épinay, the Hermitage Affair. (Having met Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1747, by 1756, d'Épinay and he were fast friends.<sup>1</sup> D'Épinay offered Rousseau a house called the Hermitage on her property at La Chevrette, where he resided in 1756 and 1757. In 1757, the two quarreled and Rousseau moved out.<sup>2</sup>) *Montbrillant* is attractive to critics eager to compare the two authors' accounts of this conflict and their portraits of one another. I thought I would be ruling on who was right and who was wrong in the Hermitage Affair. I was wrong. *Montbrillant* was about d'Épinay's life and a quarrel among friends, to a point, but it was all about Ideas. Specifically, ideas about how to live a meaningful life and what the pursuit of happiness meant. The paper I had planned to write was impossible. For one thing, it had already been done. For another thing, it did not reflect what I found in *Montbrillant*.

Out of curiosity, on August 14, 2017, I checked the Wikipedia page (in English) for Louise d'Épinay. Here is how she was (and is) described:

a French writer, a *saloniste* and woman of fashion, known on account of her liaisons with Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who gives unflattering reports of her in his *Confessions*, as well as her acquaintanceship with Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Baron d'Holbach and other French men of letters during the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 18, 73, 79. Full reference information is included in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2. For an in-depth analysis of this conflict, see Weinreb, *Eagle*, 79-97.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise\\_d'Épinay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise_d'Épinay) The article expands upon these points.

Louise d'Épinay, in other words, is an eighteenth-century French *philosophe* better remembered for her relationships with famous men than for the contributions she made as “a French writer.” What I imagined in high school – a “woman of fashion,” wigs and all – was not too far distant from this article, and the paper I had envisioned writing in my graduate seminar about what it was like to live with Rousseau fell right into line as well.

As I worked on my Ph.D., I cannot tell you how many times something like the following exchange happened:

Me: D'Épinay was against women being forced into convents when they could not get married. She thought this should be a choice. Otherwise, it was a kind of social death. It kept women from acting in the world. She did not like a convent education either. Actually, she was pretty much anti-convent overall. This theme recurs in many of her writings.

An interlocutor: Oh, well! Being against convents was a well-known Enlightenment trope. Everybody knows that. Think about *La Religieuse*. But it was everywhere.

As it turned out, d'Épinay was part of the original group-effort mystification that later became Diderot's *Religieuse*,<sup>4</sup> and I have argued elsewhere that she could have contributed more to it than that for which scholars have given her credit. The anti-convent trope is an obsession of hers to which she returns many times years before *La Religieuse*. Unlike the men involved in the mystification, d'Épinay was the only one who had likely spent time in a convent.<sup>5</sup>

As I would come to find out, d'Épinay did not simply absorb Enlightenment ideas as a by-product of spending time with the greatest male minds of her generation. She had her own ideas and was as much a cultural generator of Enlightenment philosophy as the male intellectuals who surrounded her. It was very difficult for women to write – they often lacked the time or education necessary to do so – and it was perhaps even harder to publish. As an aristocrat,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, May, *Diderot et La Religieuse: Étude historique et littéraire*.

<sup>5</sup> See d'Épinay, *Montbrillant*, 1:53n1. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Montbrillant* come from the 1951 edition of Georges Roth.

d'Épinay faced additional barriers to publication. Nonetheless, her ideas ultimately had almost as much cultural force as her male contemporaries'.

I would come to find out that Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles d'Épinay (1726-1783) was the author of educational works; contributions to the bimonthly clandestine journal of literature and culture, the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique*, which brought the *philosophes'* ideas to European heads of states;<sup>6</sup> and a prodigious correspondence with other leading Enlightenment thinkers.<sup>7</sup> She was very much a *philosophe*, or public intellectual of the Enlightenment, who subscribed to ideals such as the primacy of reason, the scientific method, progress, brother-and-sisterhood, and tolerance.

A brilliant observer of human nature, social scientist, and feminist *avant la lettre*, d'Épinay's intellectual contributions were recognized and valued among her contemporaries. But while several of d'Épinay's close literary associates have become household names, today the name Louise d'Épinay has in large part been forgotten, especially among audiences outside of France, except perhaps in connection to Rousseau and among specialists.<sup>8</sup> She is one of the lesser-known writers who are mainly remembered – if they are remembered at all – for their collaboration with big-name authors. Indeed, her importance to Enlightenment thought has often been circumscribed by her relationships to the other major writers of her age,<sup>9</sup> including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas in part inspired the French Revolution and the formation of the new French national education system in the nineteenth century, and who invented a new type of memoir for the common man; Voltaire, whose satires of religious intolerance called the established order into question; Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, editors of the

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<sup>6</sup> See Caron, Mélinda. *Écriture et vie de société*. See also Weinreb, *Eagle*, 86, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Weinreb, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Weinreb, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Weinreb, 7.



*Encyclopédie*, whose amassed knowledge represented a great epistemological leap forward; her lover, Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, editor of the *Correspondance littéraire*; the naturalist George-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon; Samuel Richardson, author of epistolary novels *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*; and the witty Neapolitan economist and *abbé* Ferdinando Galiani.

Like her male colleagues, d'Épinay participated in the kinds of collaborative writing that characterized the Republic of Letters in which she lived. Alongside Grimm and Diderot, d'Épinay played a major role in the *Correspondance littéraire*, although only recently has the full extent of her contributions begun to come to light.<sup>10</sup> Diderot relied on her to re-write some of his work because of her “natural” writing style,<sup>11</sup> and there is debate about whether some works should be rightfully attributed to Diderot or to d'Épinay.<sup>12</sup> She also played a major collaborative role in Galiani's *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés*, an economic work whose influence extended into the twentieth century and which pitted the physiocrat perspective (in favor of the free trade of grain) against the proponents of regulation.<sup>13</sup> But while her colleagues are remembered for their subversive ideas more than the role they played in other writers' works, when critics evoke d'Épinay's work, they often cast her in a supporting role and give pride of place to her collaborative literary activities, or they emphasize the influence that other writers had on d'Épinay and their contributions to her work. Outside of a handful of works by scholars including Cécile Cavallac, Ruth Plaut Weinreb, and Odette David, d'Épinay criticism has left her original contributions largely unexplored. Critics are indeed justified in discussing her

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<sup>10</sup> See Caron, *Vie de société*; Weinreb, *Eagle*, 143-144; and Kölving, “La présence de Madame d'Épinay dans la *Correspondance littéraire*.”

<sup>11</sup> Diderot, *Correspondance*, August 1773. Cited in Weinreb, *Eagle*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> See Weinreb, *Eagle*, 121-122. There is a similar concern when it comes to the authorship of some work by Galiani.

<sup>13</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 121-127.

collaborative projects, but d'Épinay, an oft-unnamed ghostwriter, contributor, and editor who has been relegated to the shadows of her Enlightenment peers, was a groundbreaking writer in her own right.

A major reason her writing is rarely considered independently is that discussions of d'Épinay's personal relationships, especially her doomed friendship with Rousseau, have overshadowed analysis of her writing. Reading *Montbrillant* as an autobiography is largely to blame. While the novel was inspired by events in the author's own life, I argue that it is better understood as an educational novel, or *roman pédagogique*, in which there is an innovative and subversive curriculum intended to change the nature of marriage and improve the lives of women. *Montbrillant* contains the long-overlooked message that inculcating sincerity in children, especially girls, could change the financial basis of marriage and abolish the unequal hierarchy existing between husband and wife. The consequences, d'Épinay suggests, would include the reform of state institutions like taxation, and her proposals thereby provide a nonviolent alternative to revolution. Reading *Montbrillant* as educational novel makes us rethink the accepted wisdom about d'Épinay's career, her relationships with her peers, the Enlightenment, and women's contributions to it. But first, in order to see *Montbrillant*'s message, we must rethink how we approach works by d'Épinay – with consequences for how we read other early modern and Enlightenment women authors.

On Method: Handling Works by Early Modern and Enlightenment Women

In the 1980s, nearly 200 years after d'Épinay's death, a "landmark debate" (to borrow Toril Moi's term<sup>14</sup>) erupted between literary critics Nancy K. Miller and Peggy Kamuf concerning the future of feminist literary scholarship. Moi argued in a 2008 article that this *querelle* has died out but that it is timelier than ever. I find that Miller and Kamuf's positions, which I will present here in simplified versions, can help us make sense of what has happened to Louise d'Épinay's work and what we can do about it.

The original Miller-Kamuf debate started in 1981, not terribly long after Roland Barthes had famously declared the death of the author in 1967, and was reprised in 1989.<sup>15</sup> Barthes had wanted to remove an author's identity – beliefs, philosophy, and experiences – from the center of literary analysis. It would no longer be a determining – and limiting – force in interpretation. Instead, many readers could find many different interpretations in a single text. Nancy K. Miller observed that this paradigm shift happened just when feminist criticism was coming into its own – just when texts by women writers, formerly consigned to oblivion, were being unearthed and deemed worthy of study. Miller argued that the death of the author served to push these women authors to the side once more.<sup>16</sup> For Peggy Kamuf, on the other side of the debate, focusing on the identity of women authors, or the "signature," repeated the same workings of western masculinist culture that had been responsible for the structure of the canon and the humanities at large for centuries. Influenced by Barthes, Derrida, and, especially, Foucault, Kamuf argued that

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<sup>14</sup> All references to Moi refer to the following article: "I am not a woman writer." (No page numbers or line numbers given.)

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Kamuf, "Replacing Feminist Criticism"; Miller, "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions"; and Kamuf and Miller, "Parisian Letters: Between Feminism and Deconstruction." See also Miller, "'I's' in Drag: the Sex of Recollection" and "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions"; Kamuf, "Writing Like a Woman."

<sup>16</sup> For more on Miller's position on Barthes, see Miller, *Subject to Change*. Her position is more complicated than the simplified version I present here; she does not want to cut ties completely with Barthes.

making a sort of separate-but-equal women's version of the same thing was not the way to go. That binary had been deconstructed, and it was more productive to treat all texts as texts and to abandon a focus on the author's identity and biography.<sup>17</sup>

A particular point of contention between Miller and Kamuf concerned the *Lettres portugaises*, an exhibition of despair over a lover's abandonment, narrated by a woman. These letters, originally published in 1669, were thought to have been written by a Portuguese nun, Mariana Alcoforado, and translated into French by Gabriel de Guilleragues. In the twentieth century, however, scholars argued that Guilleragues had written them himself.<sup>18</sup> Kamuf took a poststructuralist position, arguing that Guilleragues' having been a man did not matter for textual interpretation, because he had after all written from a woman's point of view in the *Lettres*, and moreover, anyone could write from a feminine position and do *écriture féminine*. What mattered was the text.<sup>19</sup> For Miller, on the other hand, the fact that Guilleragues had identified as a man *did* matter, because he had written as a woman not to try to empathize with women's plight, or to really enter into women's subjectivity, for that matter. Instead, he wrote the letters in order to establish a contract of sympathy with an audience of male readers, based on the "neutralization of the Other" (and that other was woman).<sup>20</sup> As in *L'Histoire d'O*,<sup>21</sup> we find "an ideology of

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<sup>17</sup> See Kamuf, "Replacing Feminist Criticism" and "Writing Like a Woman."

<sup>18</sup> Though Myriam Cyr and Philippe Sollers may disagree, the majority of scholars today accept the evidence that Guilleragues wrote it, including the following: Rougeot, "Un ouvrage inconnue de l'auteur des *Lettres portugaises*"; Deloffre, "Le Problème des *Lettres portugaises* et l'analyse stylistique"; Spitzer, "Les *Lettres portugaises*"; Green, "Who was the author of the *Lettres portugaises*?"

<sup>19</sup> See Kamuf, "Writing Like a Woman."

<sup>20</sup> "'I's' in Drag," 50.

<sup>21</sup> The author of *Histoire d'O*, Pauline Réage (the pen name of Anne Desclos), wrote scholarly articles about d'Épinay under the name Dominique Aury.

desire that allows woman to become a subject only upon the condition of her ‘subordination... before a god-like phallus,’” states Miller, quoting from Catharine Stimpson’s “Ad/d Feminam.”<sup>22</sup>

In her 2008 article “I am not a woman writer,” whose title quotes Nathalie Sarraute, Toril Moi argues that feminism has shifted attention away from the issues at stake in the Miller-Kamuf debate and from aesthetic questions altogether. Moi blames two historical developments: the ascendance of poststructuralism and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), in whose wake, Moi argues, invoking the category “woman author” seems to deny that gender is performative. But, Moi says, Butler presents a theory of the origins of gender. Recalling Beauvoir’s insight that man is the universal and woman is the Other, Moi explains, “[n]o theory about the origins of gender will change the fact that in a sexist society people who are taken to be women will be perceived as Other in relation to a male norm.” By this logic, we can still speak of women authors. As Moi puts it, “When I claim that Nathalie Sarraute or Virginia Woolf are women writers, then, all you need to acknowledge is that they have been perceived as women who write, and that they also took themselves to be women.”

Moi observes that while critics apologize for working on women’s writing, issues of authority and authorship were important to a majority of women writing literature in 2008. Moi shows that the statement “I am not a woman writer” is always a “defensive speech act” that is uttered as a way to avoid being “imprisoned” by one’s gender and underscores that women writers face an impossible dilemma: “write as a woman or like a woman,” which might mean “conform to some stereotypical norm for feminine writing” or else “feel that she has to write as a generic human being,” which “opens up an alienating split between her gender and her

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<sup>22</sup> “Text’s Heroine,” *Conflicts*, 116.

humanity.”<sup>23</sup> Though there is no solution, Moi encourages writers to call attention to the dilemma “and then – as far as possible – [to] refuse to choose between two equally hopeless options [...]”

Moi stresses that “theory and practice appear to be just as out of synch as they were by the end of the 1980s.” What can critics do? First, “*avoid laying down requirements for what a woman’s writing must be like.*”<sup>24</sup> Also, Moi sees a lack of confrontation at the heart of Miller and Kamuf’s *querelle*: “Kamuf presents a theory that Miller never attacks; Miller stresses a political purpose that Kamuf never challenges.” Moi thus calls for renewed theoretical engagement: “[w]e actually need to be able to justify theoretically a kind of work [on women’s writing] that many women and men clearly think is important, and that has no problem justifying itself politically.” My approach is different and it is pragmatic. I propose that we can use the two already-existing positions to counterbalance each other in scholarship on early modern women’s writing, and that doing so will solve some of the ongoing problems in the field going forward. In this study, I will demonstrate how it can be done using the example of d’Épinay’s writing.

The Miller-Kamuf debate featured a French-American philosophical divide, with Kamuf in the sophisticated, French theory-inflected position (which Miller equated with Cixous’ fashionable – but “frivolous” – shoes) and Miller on the side of American-style feminism (and presumably its frumpy, serviceable shoes).<sup>25</sup> Today, scholars steeped in both traditions (and

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<sup>23</sup> For contrast, Moi points out that a male nurse would never need to say, “I am a nurse, not a male nurse.”

<sup>24</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>25</sup> “Text’s Heroine,” *Conflicts*, 113.

others besides) approach early modern women's writing with a shared set of destructive assumptions.<sup>26</sup>

To summarize these, we might write the following two equations: men = *philosophes*, good education, important thoughts about the world, writing "for a social purpose" (and diaries and other so-called women's genres if they so chose).<sup>27</sup> Women = not *philosophes*, zero or substandard education, life writing and letters focused on personal experiences (by necessity – no choice). It seems perfectly logical: women, denied the sort of education and contact with the public sphere that would allow prescriptive thinking about their society, could only write about mundane matters. Many critics want us to embrace the genres that were practiced by women.<sup>28</sup> Recognizing women's writing in the contexts where it happened is an admirable project and surely worthy of our efforts.

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<sup>26</sup> The critics I cite in this study have various degrees of familiarity with the French and American university systems and may be thought to have received exposure to one or the other tradition in varying degrees.

<sup>27</sup> The quoted phrase comes from the following example, chosen at random, that illustrates these assumptions (that in turn come from well-known, historically accurate facts about early modern women's experiences): Donato, Clorinda. Rev. of *La Fabrique de l'intime: Mémoires et journaux de femmes du XVIIIe siècle*, by Catriona Seth. Excerpts include:

The *journal intime* [...] is a genre that was [...] being polished and perfected by women from the time of Mme de Sévigné's seventeenth-century letters to her daughter, when epistolary writing, a close cousin of the *mémoire* or *journal intime*, had become an outlet for women who, unlike their male counterparts, had not had the luxury of a classical education and therefore almost always wrote from the platform of their lived experience. (429)

As Seth reminds us [...], an increasing focus on an individual's personal trajectory, in contrast with the writing for a social purpose that characterized the literary production of many of the *philosophes*, prompted men and women alike to engage in more personal meditations on their relationship with the world around them. (431)

<sup>28</sup> The review in the note above is a good example. The reviewer says we should, among other things, reclaim the *journal intime* for women from Benjamin Constant, who gets a lot of the credit for having defined that genre due to the lengthy tomes he authored that bear the name of the genre as their title (429).

But if we think they largely write diaries and letters and do not write in other genres, we tend to approach any text by women authors as autobiographical. We also come up against some *idées reçues* about life writing: that it is immediate, spontaneous, sincere, authentic, self-focused, and myopic – not constructed, mediated, heavily revised, and outwardly focused. (The exception would be letters that were intended to be read aloud.) One consequence is that we tend to treat writing by women as authentic expressions of the female psyche. Another is that we think that there cannot be anything “for a social purpose” in life writing and so we are not looking for it. Thus, our expectations of the genres may punish women who actually *did* succeed in having thoughts about their societies and expressing them through the socially approved channels of letters and diaries.

It seems we are still at the same impasse where Miller and Kamuf left the *Lettres portugaises* in terms of how we approach early modern women’s writing. Can we remember, on the one hand, the difficulties women faced in publishing, and even writing in the first place, without imposing stereotypes on women’s literature that lead us to overlook important content and prevent us from judging it with clear eyes? Can we balance a focus on the author’s identity with a focus on the text? Can we make judicious statements about women’s subjectivity without policing who gets to speak “correctly” for women? I propose that scholars wishing to resolve these dilemmas need only try to achieve a balance and consider whether their work speaks to both Miller and Kamuf’s positions, for each provides a strong corrective to the other. Put another way, if the previous scholarship on a given woman author has favored one position over the other, it is a worthy experiment to see what new insight about her work the opposite position will yield. This, in short, is the method I use in this study of d’Épinay. Before we examine her case, however it will be helpful to illustrate the method by looking briefly at a case that represents the



inverse of d'Épinay's: a correspondent of Rousseau's known as Henriette \*\*\*, whose identity has never been established.<sup>29</sup>

In applying the Miller-Kamuf debate to current scholarship, I have been inspired by the work of Mary McAlpin, who revisited this *querelle* in her 2009 book, *Gender, Authenticity, and the Missive Letter in Eighteenth-Century France*. McAlpin argues that rather than simply being victims of a patriarchal system that would have barred them from publishing, women writers who wanted to become published authors were savvy enough to manipulate the conventions of modesty applied to their sex in the service of their goals.<sup>30</sup> Often, an important first step to getting published was to have one's letters leaked – one path to publication that society allowed. Women had to pretend to be horrified, and many undoubtedly were genuinely upset, but sometimes the leak may have been precisely their objective. McAlpin makes a convincing case that this may have been the strategy of Fanny Burney, Jeanne-Marie Roland (Marie-Jeanne Phlippon), Mme de Villeguier, Julie de Lespinasse, Mme de Graffigny, Suzanne Necker (*née* Curchod), and Rousseau correspondents Marie-Anne de La Tour and Henriette \*\*\*. And yet, McAlpin shows that readers throughout the last two hundred years, including Laclos, Roger Duchêne, and Dena Goodman, almost always refer to these women as authors *malgré elles*.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, they refer to their letters as authentic expressions of their authors' inner emotional lives. In contrast, says McAlpin (citing critic Rufus Reiberg), scholars readily accept that the letters James Boswell wrote to Rousseau were part of a “‘dramatized quest for identity’ that includes the possibility of a desire for future publication” (172). Boswell adopted a different strategy than his women contemporaries – bold bragging about his worthy qualities in contrast to

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<sup>29</sup> See Séité, ed., *Rousseau-Henriette\*\*\* Correspondance (1764-1770)*.

<sup>30</sup> See “Postscript: De La Tour, James Boswell, Henriette \*\*\*, and Gender Theory” in *Gender, Authenticity, and the Missive Letter*, 160-185.

<sup>31</sup> See McAlpin, 167.

the women's humble, self-effacing deference – but critics seem unable to see that women's self-effacement could be no more than a posture that it was necessary to adopt in their writings to great men like Rousseau in order to engage their chosen correspondents in a correspondence that would be publication-worthy.<sup>32</sup> In other words, their tactics may have been different, but their aims very similar to Boswell's.

One of McAlpin's examples is Henriette \*\*\*. In 1764-65, Henriette, who either was or pretended to be a woman from Paris, wrote Rousseau a series of letters about his disparaging views in Book V of *Émile* on the subject of women improving their minds. Ostensibly, she sought his blessing to go against his teaching, to study, and to have serious intellectual discussions with educated men, as a means of consoling herself for the deep unhappiness she felt because she could not fit into the ideal of domestic bliss Rousseau prescribed for women: as a noble over age 30 with no money for a dowry, she would not be able to marry and would have no place in society. At first, Rousseau took her for Suzanne Curchod (later known as Mme Necker),<sup>33</sup> and chastised her for using her intellect to attract attention. After Henriette protested that she hated showing off her knowledge, Rousseau began to offer her advice: that she retire to the countryside and study only for herself, sharing her knowledge with no one. After a while, Rousseau stopped responding to her letters altogether, although Henriette continued to write. She asked in a 1765 letter if the rumors that she had heard were true about Rousseau moving.<sup>34</sup> Then she wrote him again in 1770, asking if she could meet him in person. Rousseau claimed he had

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<sup>32</sup> Such a posture would seem all the more necessary if one considers Rousseau a misogynist. For a divergent perspective (specifically focusing on the *Lettre à d'Alembert*) arguing that Rousseau was not misogynist considering the historical context, see Rosenblatt, "On the 'Misogyny' of Jean-Jacques Rousseau." On Rousseau's attitudes toward women, see also: Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 13-72; Ice, *Resolving the Paradox of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Sexual Politics*.

<sup>33</sup> See McAlpin, 175.

<sup>34</sup> See Séité, *Rousseau-Henriette\*\*\* Correspondance (1764-1770)*, 116.

forgotten her and he did not want to meet her without “definite proofs” of her identity, and that is where their correspondence seemed to end, but Henriette prepared their exchange for publication, suppressing two of her letters and adding commentary, including an introduction and conclusion. In her remarks, although she had earlier expressed repugnance at the thought of living a quiet life in the country and giving up the hope of living as a sort of a public intellectual surrounded by learned men, she claims to have taken Rousseau’s advice to withdraw from the public eye after all and to have found peace as a result. (*And yet she prepared the letters for publication*, as McAlpin underscores,<sup>35</sup> so she was lying.)

McAlpin shows that critics from Hippolyte Buffenoir, who published the first edition of Henriette’s letters in 1902,<sup>36</sup> to Ralph A. Leigh, who published them as part of Rousseau’s correspondence (1973, 1974),<sup>37</sup> to Mary Trouille, who discussed them in *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Readers Read Rousseau* (1997),<sup>38</sup> are all united in taking Henriette to be who she claimed to be,<sup>39</sup> whereas Rousseau himself had suspicions on more than one occasion (though some readers might chalk them up to paranoia). To this list of scholars, I would add Yannick Séité, whose 2014 edition is the first complete edition of Henriette’s letters that presents both sides of the correspondence and also restores the letters Henriette suppressed when she prepared the rest for publication,<sup>40</sup> and Anne-Françoise Gilbert, who concludes, in a 2004 article, that writing to Rousseau allows Henriette a way into literary production, needed because “as a

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, McAlpin, 182.

<sup>36</sup> Buffenoir, ed., *J.-J. Rousseau et Henriette, jeune Parisienne inconnue. Manuscrit inédit du XVIIIème siècle*.

<sup>37</sup> Leigh, ed., *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Vol. 19-21.

<sup>38</sup> Trouille, *Sexual Politics*, 73-93.

<sup>39</sup> See McAlpin, 177-180.

<sup>40</sup> Séité, *Rousseau – Henriette \*\*\*: Correspondance (1764-1770)*.

woman, [she] is excluded from social participation.”<sup>41</sup> McAlpin alone suggests that Henriette “may well have been misrepresenting the circumstances of her life in her letters” (180). As I have argued elsewhere, she could have been a woman who had a long writing career and a history of participating in mystifications. Or she could have been a man. Or a group of people.

But authorship in the eighteenth century was often collaborative or pseudonymous,<sup>42</sup> and after all, it may be impossible ever to know for sure who Henriette was. Why, then, does it matter? Surely we can just analyze what she wrote and the authorial persona she presents in her letters. This is analysis from the Kamuf position, and it is precisely what scholars like Trouille and Gilbert have done so well. But here we could benefit from the antidote – Miller. There is a political imperative to think about the possibility that Henriette was indeed misrepresenting herself, because of the long tradition of thinking that women can only produce letters and diaries and that such works are authentic expressions of the female psyche. Even to consider the possibility that we cannot take Henriette at her word works against this ingrained idea. Also, insight gained from the Miller position shakes or expands the Kamuf position in this case. Henriette did not actually publish the letters during her lifetime. But maybe she wrote to Rousseau under false pretenses to get him to take back his statements on women’s education because she planned to publish this big scoop all along. Maybe it was to have been a joke in the context of her publication that she “had given up” writing. In that case, the tone would be ironic and the message from the text very different.

D’Épinay’s case is the reverse of Henriette’s: the existing scholarship presents us with an over-focus on the (simplified) Miller position – the author’s biography and her identity. What we need is more reading of the text on its own terms, without preconceived ideas about what genre it

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<sup>41</sup> Gilbert, “Deconstructing Gender: Henriette’s Correspondence with Rousseau.”

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Griffin, *Authorship in the Long Eighteenth Century*.

belongs to or what capacities we think its author is likely to have had. In other words, we need a dose of Kamuf-style reading.

In 1928, Virginia Woolf said, “[t]he natural simplicity, the epic age of women’s writing, may have gone. [...] The impulse toward autobiography may be spent. She [the woman writer] may be beginning to use writing as an art, not as a method of self-expression.”<sup>43</sup> With the greatest respect to Woolf, I would suggest that part of our problem might be our obstinate refusal to consider the full range of possibilities for autobiographical writing that is not considered truly literary. I think we should reexamine our assumptions about what life writing may be presumed to contain and approach works by women as free of expectations as possible, all the while keeping in mind the historical realities that women faced, so that we can ultimately transcend an exclusive focus on the challenges they faced and celebrate the “highly specific and idiosyncratic” women who wrote,<sup>44</sup> without, too, falling into the trap of thinking, “this is an exceptional woman writing.”

While it is well nigh impossible, nor would it be desirable, to completely sever a work from its context, in this study I will rebalance close reading and d’Épinay’s context, and the organization of the study’s three parts reflects this aim.

In Part one, “Questioning the Traditional Narrative about Louise d’Épinay and *L’Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*,” I call into question the more than 200-year history of *Montbrillant* interpretation, in which, until now, d’Épinay’s novel has exclusively been labeled memoir or autobiographical novel and its primary interest has been d’Épinay’s relationships.

Chapter one, “Re-Thinking Louise d’Épinay and *L’Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*’s Place in Enlightenment Culture,” argues that while d’Épinay wrote on many

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<sup>43</sup> *A Room of One’s Own*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Moi, “I am not a woman writer.”

topics and had many critiques of her society to offer, she was concerned with finding the best method of education throughout her entire career, and that *Montbrillant* fits into a pattern of educational writing we can trace through several of her works.

Chapter two, “The Many Genres of *Montbrillant*,” presents an analysis of the major themes and stylistic features of d’Épinay’s novel and addresses the evidence that *Montbrillant* does indeed contain some autobiographical content and may be considered a *roman à clef*. I show that the novel in fact displays the formal characteristics of many genres, but that it can accurately be described as *roman pédagogique*.

Chapter three, “*Montbrillant*’s Manuscript, Publication, and Reception History,” explains that *Montbrillant* has long been understood as a memoir because of the intervention of nineteenth-century editors who purposefully deformed what they found in the manuscripts for commercial gain and the choices of twentieth-century editors who followed their lead. I show that nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on *Montbrillant*, including much of the feminist criticism done in the last 35 years, has also been deeply influenced by nineteenth-century editions marketed as d’Épinay’s memoirs and has treated *Montbrillant* as autobiographical.

In Part two, “Reading *Montbrillant* as *Roman pédagogique*,” I present the first-ever comprehensive reading of *Montbrillant* as educational novel and place the focus squarely on *Montbrillant* as a text, Kamuf-style. The close reading of *Montbrillant* is thus in the physical center of my dissertation and it is the longest section. In this way, I am consciously acting to counterbalance the over-focus on d’Épinay’s biography that has so far dominated in critical work about her. While I do discuss some of d’Épinay’s relationships in Part two, these are exclusively *intertextual* relationships and the center of attention remains d’Épinay’s ideas.

Chapter four, “Reading *Montbrillant* as *Roman pédagogique*,” analyzes the structure of d’Épinay’s novel to show that educational concerns are central to every aspect of its construction, and that the structure is based on a series of contrasts that show the superiority of d’Épinay’s educational methods over those of her contemporaries like Rousseau and those that were commonly employed by so-called professional educators – in schools, in convents, and by *précepteurs* – at the time.

Chapter five, “Parents versus Tutors, Sévigné versus Rousseau,” explains how thinking of *Montbrillant* as a *roman à clef* can still be useful in reading for its educational content, but that instead of considering the characters necessarily as *clefs* for real-life contemporaries of d’Épinay’s, we must consider them rather as *clefs* for different educational positions. The chapter considers the example of the *clefs* for the positions of Rousseau and of the great seventeenth-century letter-writer Madame de Sévigné, who provides the authoritative counterweight to Rousseau’s views. In Sévigné, who wanted her daughter Françoise-Marguerite to educate her grand-daughter Pauline at home instead of sending her to a convent, d’Épinay found a model of women educating their children themselves, at home, through reading, writing, conversation, and introspection, that she adapted to fit Enlightenment ideals. Sévigné also provides a model for marriage based on intelligence and a strong moral foundation, rather than a dowry, an important piece of d’Épinay’s educational thought, as these are qualities that can be cultivated at home. D’Épinay places a special emphasis on the development of sincerity, building on themes she finds in Sévigné.

Chapter six, “Reading *Montbrillant* as an Education in Sincerity,” examines d’Épinay’s messages on sincerity in detail. Though she at first seems to advocate for dissimulation as a survival strategy for women to protect themselves from mistreatment, d’Épinay shows that

dissimulation ultimately deforms the self and that being sincere is the only way women can break out of the substandard conditions in which they live. The chapter explains d'Épinay's proposal that sincerity is worth more than a dowry, and how she believes sincerity will change both the financial and affective bases of marriage.

In chapter seven, "How *Montbrillant* Co-opts Forms of Catholic Spirituality to Teach Sincerity," I discuss how exactly d'Épinay proposed to teach women to be more sincere, using secular versions of elements taken from traditional Catholicism, including the consultation of a spiritual director, a daily examination of conscience, and a rule adapted from religious orders.

Chapter eight, "D'Épinay's Reforms for the Family and the State," explores the implications of d'Épinay's educational program. I first discuss *Montbrillant*'s portrayal of the victimization of women, focusing on the figure of Émilie's husband, who is abusive both in his role as head of his family and as representative of the State and is part of a network of other corrupt men in power who collude to cover up their crimes. D'Épinay also describes a kind of financial irresponsibility that extends all the way up to the king himself, understood to be the father in the French "family." For d'Épinay, using sincerity to change the nature of marriage could be a way of nonviolently transforming the public sphere starting at the level of the individual family.

Part three, "The Radical Implications of d'Épinay's Educational Program: Sincerity Economics and the Quiet Revolution," re-contextualizes d'Épinay's *Montbrillant* in light of reading the work as an educational novel, because changing how we understand the work changes how we understand the work in context, too.

Chapter nine, "*Montbrillant*: A New Chronology," considers evidence from other texts by d'Épinay and Grimm that indicate that *Montbrillant* was intended to be an educational novel.



The evidence suggests that *Montbrillant* may have been written earlier than has been thought until now and that it was likely a response to the educational ideas in Rousseau's *Julie* and a source of inspiration for *Émile*.

In chapter ten, "Reading *Montbrillant* as *Miroir des princes*," I read *Montbrillant*, along with d'Épinay's *Lettres à mon fils* and essays by Grimm in 1755 issues of the *Correspondance littéraire*, as part of a larger educational project whose aim was to promote, among the *CL*'s audience of *élites*, the diffusion of a secular catechism based on the love of virtue and truth, which was meant to foster the development of an inner moral compass in each individual. Each letter in *Lettres à mon fils* distills one important truth from *Montbrillant*, and the *CL* was used to distribute these pieces of d'Épinay's educational program incrementally.

Voltaire described d'Épinay as "un aigle dans une cage de gauze,"<sup>45</sup> and *Montbrillant* shows us that with the keen eye of an eagle, d'Épinay diagnosed the greatest ills plaguing her society including the many varieties of violence against and injustice toward women. She showed how these were wide ranging systemic problems and proposed visionary solutions. Rather than focusing on her life, this study explores what *Montbrillant* can tell us about d'Épinay as a *philosophe*, about her ideas, particularly those about how to go on living in the face of evil and misfortune, and how to improve society through changing education.

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<sup>45</sup> See Weinreb, *Eagle*, 5.

Part One:

Questioning the Traditional Narrative about Louise d'Épinay and L'*Histoire de Madame  
de Montbrillant*

## Chapter One: Re-thinking Louise d'Épinay and *L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*'s Place in Enlightenment Culture

This chapter discusses d'Épinay's importance as an author and member of Enlightenment literary circles.<sup>1</sup> Because reconceiving of *Montbrillant* will cause us to reevaluate its place in d'Épinay's body of work, I will examine each of her works. One of the central concerns of d'Épinay's career as an author was the reform of education. In various works, she elaborated idealized curricula for girls and boys that were meant to help human beings perfect themselves and their institutions. Scholars have traditionally considered only two of d'Épinay's volumes, *Les Lettres à mon fils* and *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, her pedagogical works, but I argue that both *Montbrillant* and another work, *Mes Moments heureux*, also form part of d'Épinay's evolving educational thought.

D'Épinay's literary output covered many topics and incorporated the characteristics of several genres – she was interested in a lot more than education. The best account of d'Épinay's writing is furnished by Ruth Plaut Weinreb in her *Eagle in a Gauze Cage: Louise d'Épinay, Femme de Lettres*, a biography and literary analysis structured around each of d'Épinay's major works, and interested readers will find more information there about the range of topics on which d'Épinay wrote. However, education is a topic with which she engaged constantly. She formed thoughtful, nuanced positions based on observation and even reversed and then returned to some of them over time.

### What Did Louise d'Épinay Write?

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<sup>1</sup> Interested readers will find a biography of d'Épinay, including other aspects of her life besides her writing, in Élisabeth Badinter's *Mme du Châtelet, Mme d'Épinay ou l'Ambition féminine au XVIIIe siècle*, although the reader must be warned that Badinter accepts as fact details that d'Épinay relays in her novel *Montbrillant*. Another source is Weinreb's *Eagle in a Gauze Cage*.

The earliest of d'Épinay's works that were published during her lifetime likely date from 1747. She gathered many of her early works written between 1747 and 1756 into *Mes moments heureux*,<sup>2</sup> a volume she published in 1759, and which includes many letters to and from friends and family, a self-portrait,<sup>3</sup> portraits of others,<sup>4</sup> instructions on how her daughter was to be educated,<sup>5</sup> dialogues,<sup>6</sup> bucolic love stories,<sup>7</sup> and *Pièces fugitives*, several prose and verse pieces. The works cover a wide range of subjects, including reflections on happiness, friendship, politics, philosophy,<sup>8</sup> marriage,<sup>9</sup> her writing projects, her relationships with other intellectuals,<sup>10</sup> her health problems,<sup>11</sup> and even her dog.<sup>12</sup> The tone of the pieces ranges from serious to comical.

Educational themes run through many of *Moments'* works. One of the most important is the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* (1756), which, in many regards, contains the *noyau* of d'Épinay's educational philosophy.<sup>13</sup> In it, d'Épinay reveals that after “une longue étude de son caractère” (35) she has devised an ideal plan of education for her daughter Angélique and she shares it with her daughter's governess who will help her implement it. The end of this letter suggests that Angélique's marriage will be favorably affected by the education she will receive, in contrast to the distressing portraits of marriage *Moments* offers in the *Lettre à la Présidente de*

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<sup>2</sup> See D'Épinay, *Œuvres II (Mes Moments heureux)*. Unless otherwise noted, all references to this work are from the edition by Paul-Armand Challemeil-Lacour.

<sup>3</sup> *Mon portrait*.

<sup>4</sup> For example, *Portrait de Mme de ...*, which is about Sophie d'Houdetot.

<sup>5</sup> *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, *Fragment d'une lettre* (1756).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Les Illusions* (1756), *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre* (1756), *Le Ruban* (1759), *Le Présent intéressé* (1750), *Le Cadran de l'amour* (1758), and *L'Introducteur de Savoie* (1758).

<sup>8</sup> On friendship, see d'Épinay's exchange of letters with Dr. Tronchin from the summer and fall of 1756.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *Lettre à la Présidente de M\*\*\** (1747) and *Lettre à M\*\*\** (1756).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *À Tyran le Blanc* (1756).

<sup>11</sup> For example, in a letter to Saint-Lambert (See Weinreb, *Eagle*, 28).

<sup>12</sup> See *Portrait de Lirette, ma chienne* (1757).

<sup>13</sup> See d'Épinay, *Œuvres II (Moments)*, 35-49.

M\*\*\* (1747) and the *Lettre à M\*\*\** (1756).<sup>14</sup> In her correspondence with her doctor, the well-known Tronchin, d'Épinay also tackles questions that bear on education, including how to be happy, whether a person born with a sensitive temperament can change or not, and where one can find the ideal environment in which to learn to be a good citizen.<sup>15</sup> In a 1756 letter to Monsieur de S<sup>t</sup>-L\*\*\* (the marquis Jean-François de Saint-Lambert), d'Épinay asks for advice on educating her daughter and reveals several of her own opinions on the subject.<sup>16</sup>

D'Épinay produced half of the works in *Mes Moments heureux* in 1756.<sup>17</sup> 1756, d'Épinay's thirtieth year, marked a turning point for the author.<sup>18</sup> By this time, she had fulfilled the normal societal requirements for women of her class,<sup>19</sup> in other words, she had married and had borne her children. She would have also had certain social obligations in her early married life – entertaining, visiting, and going to the theater – that would have kept her from writing. One of the most iconic images of the perennially-interrupted woman writer is that of Jane Austen hiding away her pages of writing in her writing desk whenever someone else entered the room. While we do not know if d'Épinay had a similar strategy, we do know that by 1756, d'Épinay had obtained a *séparation de biens*, or separation of assets, from her husband,<sup>20</sup> meant to keep her and her children's money out of his greedy hands, and she had started to make important literary contacts; she had distanced herself from a type of life she did not want to lead and had

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<sup>14</sup> For the *Lettre à la Présidente de M\*\*\**, see 9-24. For the *Lettre à M\*\*\**, see 25-34.

<sup>15</sup> See 92-127.

<sup>16</sup> See 137-140.

<sup>17</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 8. Weinreb uses d'Épinay's stay in Geneva 1757-1759 to divide d'Épinay's life into two parts, saying she became more confident during this period when she was not controlled by her mother, Grimm, or anyone else. See, for example, *Eagle*, 115 and Weinreb, "Double Vision," 390. I, on the other hand, see 1756 as the starting point of d'Épinay's "new life" as an author, with the time spent in Geneva as a continuation of an evolution that began earlier. My division is based on the kinds and amount of writing d'Épinay was doing at the time.

<sup>19</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 105.

<sup>20</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 1.

turned her attention more fully to writing and to making plans for educating her children, two enterprises which were often indissolubly linked throughout her career.

1756 was a year of extraordinary literary production for d'Épinay. It marked her first contributions to the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*.<sup>21</sup> Becoming involved in this enterprise must have been transformative for d'Épinay. Excitement crackles through the pages of the 1756 letters she published in *Moments*, which chronicle the secretive exploits of les Ours, le Syndic, and other pseudonymous *CL* associates. In contrast to how Rousseau would later portray her (someone who wanted to put shackles on her friends), d'Épinay tells her friend Gauffecourt in a February, 1756 letter that “Ma devise est: LIBERTÉ” (*Moments*, 89). In another 1756 letter, this one addressed to “Monsieur D\*\*\*,” d'Épinay modifies the formula slightly: “Souvenez-vous, mon cher Ours, que LIBERTÉ et SURETÉ est notre devise” (*Moments*, 151). *Liberté* refers to the free reign she grants her imagination – or the free reign that has been granted her by the opportunity to write for the *CL*. This includes freethinking on religious matters. *Suret* refers to the secret, the mutual trust, and the complicity of the group's members to protect each other and the identities of the *CL*'s readership.<sup>22</sup>

The majority of the works d'Épinay included in *Mes Moments heureux* come from her involvement with this group, and many depict their literary workings together. The title *Mes Moments heureux* and the fact that the work begins with a self portrait show that far from defining herself as a woman of fashion the way history has tended to do, d'Épinay defined herself as an intellectual and a writer. Although d'Épinay employs a typical woman-writer trope, downplaying her own contributions and calling them “écarts” and “délassements d'une

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<sup>21</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> In this particular letter, she trusts M. D\*\*\* not to share a piece of her writing with others.

meditation plus sérieuse” in her *dédicace* (viii), *Moments*’ content contains key aspects of her philosophy.

D’Épinay’s poem *A Tyran le Blanc*, written in 1756 and published in both *Mes Moments heureux* (1758) and the *Correspondance littéraire* (1756),<sup>23</sup> provides a portrait of d’Épinay’s prodigious literary output, as well as the range of genres and styles in which she wrote. She portrays the White Tyrant (Grimm) commanding her to write whatever pleases him:

[...]  
Tantôt c’est une comédie,  
Puis un portrait, puis un discours  
Sur les grâces, sur les amours ;  
Un roman, une historiette,  
Un bouquet, une chansonnette...  
Que sais-je enfin? [...].<sup>24</sup>

In the image of the tyrant who demands that d’Épinay write whilst his own imagination stays tranquil or is plunged in melancholia, we find a familiar trope, described by Mary McAlpin, of the woman writer who claims to write for some reason other than because it is dictated by her own will. Here d’Épinay paints herself as an author *malgré elle*. However, *A Tyran le Blanc* is part of d’Épinay’s coming out as a writer. Even though she leans on the “someone else compelled me to write” trope, here she is setting the stage for being a major force in the *CL* as a writer and sometime-editor over the course of the next nearly 30 years. Indeed, in the years following 1756, d’Épinay contributed book and theater reviews and educational and other philosophical work to the *Correspondance littéraire*,<sup>25</sup> although she did not sign her articles or was only identified by elliptical references like Mme \*\*\* and “une femme d’esprit” rather than

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<sup>23</sup> See 15 août 1756.

<sup>24</sup> *Œuvres (Moments)*, 163-165.

<sup>25</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 10. See also: Caron, *Vie de société* and Kølving, “La présence de Madame d’Épinay dans la *Correspondance littéraire*.”

as Mme d'Épinay.<sup>26</sup> She also served as the newsletter's editor (though not openly) during periods when Grimm was unable to fulfill this function.<sup>27</sup> *A Tyran le Blanc* is a strong statement: d'Épinay is letting readers know that she can write anything in any genre and that, by extension, she could be behind anything they read in the *CL*, even if her name is not on it.

1756 was also a key year in d'Épinay's development as an educator: besides the thoughts that she elaborated in *Moments*, such as the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, which was written in that year,<sup>28</sup> in 1756, she became inspired with a new idea, namely that writing letters to her son could have significant educational potential, and this led her to write an educational work called *Les Lettres à mon fils*.<sup>29</sup> The twelve letters in this volume, addressed to d'Épinay's nine-year-old son, are largely concerned with the development of his moral and logical reasoning, self-discipline, ability to see through flattery and empty praise, and discussion of the subjects he should study: principally, languages, literature, and philosophy.<sup>30</sup> Among the letters are two long parables.<sup>31</sup> Sincerity, virtue, and moral rectitude are major themes. D'Épinay highlights her role as mother and educator, and believes she can do better than a stranger, even an erudite one, as a teacher: “j'ai regardé la tendresse, le sentiment, l'instinct d'une mère, comme supérieurs à tout ce que la réflexion et la sagesse peuvent suggérer de plus lumineux” (25), she writes, opening the door for other mothers to follow her example. The counterpart to the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, d'Épinay's advice to her son is the fruit of a long study of his character, for which “la

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<sup>26</sup> On d'Épinay not signing her articles, see Badinter, *Ambition*, 358. On d'Épinay's feminine-modesty strategy of *anonymat*, see Caron, *Vie de société*, 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2; 147. Kölving identifies the dates when d'Épinay is likely to have served as editor, for example in 1771. See “La présence de Madame d'Épinay.” Caron also gives information on d'Épinay's editorial contributions in *Vie de société*.

<sup>28</sup> *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* shares many of the same themes as the *Lettres à mon fils*.

<sup>29</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Les Lettres à mon fils* come from the edition by Ruth Plaut Weinreb.

<sup>30</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 34-35.

<sup>31</sup> See *Les Lettres à mon fils*, III, VIII (Weinreb, *Eagle*, 35).



vigilance maternelle” is especially well suited: “Elle lui fait prévoir l’avenir, combien de loin ce qui doit résulter des inclinations, des talents, du caractère d’un jeune homme, de l’être auquel il paraît appelé par les circonstances, par ses penchants, par sa fortune: elle en forme dès lors le plan général de l’éducation le plus convenable” (24). Eight of the twelve letters were published in the *Correspondance littéraire* in 1756 and 1757.<sup>32</sup>

In 1756, a letter appeared in the gazette the *Mercur de France*, addressed to a woman who was seriously interested in her children’s education (“une dame occupée sérieusement de l’éducation de ses enfants”),<sup>33</sup> the same designation used in the *Correspondance littéraire* where several of d’Épinay’s letters were published serially; readers recognized this woman as d’Épinay and the author of the 12-page letter as Grimm. This letter praises d’Épinay’s educational program for her son as well as all the effort she personally put into raising her children, in contrast to the other mothers of her social class.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, and most importantly for our study, 1756 was also a key year in d’Épinay’s development as an educational thinker because it was the year she likely started writing *Montbrillant*, her semiautobiographical epistolary novel of education. D’Épinay scholar Ruth Plaut Weinreb believes d’Épinay likely continued writing until 1762; Weinreb’s evidence shows that d’Épinay most likely had completed the draft, at the latest, sometime before her friend the economist-abbé Ferdinando Galiani left Paris in 1769.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> All dates come from *Lettres*, ed. Weinreb, and the page numbers in parentheses refer to this text. *Première lettre* was published in the 15 juin 1756 edition of the *CL* (29). The *Seconde Lettre* was in 15 mai 1756 (37), as was the *Troisième Lettre* (48). The *Quatrième Lettre* appeared 16 juillet 1756 (53), the *Cinquième Lettre* 15 septembre 1756 (57), the *Sixième Lettre* 30 octobre 1756 (61), the *Neuvième Lettre* 1 juillet 1757 (73), and the *Dixième Lettre* 20 septembre 1757 (77).

<sup>33</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 204.

<sup>34</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 210.

<sup>35</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 72-73.

So what then is *Montbrillant*? It is, in many ways, a *magnum opus*, a massive novel running to 1,800 pages and three volumes in published editions, containing certain pieces of her earlier writing, such as the *Lettre à la Présidente de M\*\*\** (1747) and the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* (1756) from *Mes moments heureux*. However, unlike *Moments*, d'Épinay did not publish *Montbrillant* during her lifetime. Weinreb suggests variously that it was because d'Épinay had competing demands on her time, because she wanted to avoid scandal, as characters in *Montbrillant* were inspired by real individuals,<sup>36</sup> because the work had “grown beyond [her] control,” or because she was “dissatisfied” with it. Weinreb suggests that “[...] the prospect of integrating its disparate strands may have become daunting” (*Eagle*, 76). Élisabeth Badinter argues that although d'Épinay originally set out to publish the novel, over time, she became more and more convinced that women should be modest and should not draw attention to themselves, and so she abandoned the idea of publishing it, though she was constantly tempted by ambition and by publishing.<sup>37</sup> D'Épinay's comments to Grimm indicate that she considered the manuscripts to be in some sense incomplete, and she left them to him to prepare for publication after her death.<sup>38</sup> In my reading, d'Épinay did not lose control of *Montbrillant*. When read as an educational novel, its threads are not disparate but woven together. Nor did she abandon the idea of broadcasting the ideas in it out of modesty. D'Épinay may not have been satisfied with it, however, and may not have felt that it was finished.

In 1757, d'Épinay left the environs of Paris for Geneva,<sup>39</sup> where she consulted Dr. Tronchin about her chronic ailments.<sup>40</sup> While in Geneva, she took advantage of an offer from her

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<sup>36</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 357-360.

<sup>38</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1: ix. See also Mme d'Épinay's testament of 11 September 1782.

<sup>39</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 30.

friend Gauffecourt to use his printing press on his nearby property, Montbrillant,<sup>41</sup> to publish two early works: in 1758, twenty-five copies of *Mes Moments heureux*, which she claimed were only meant for her friends,<sup>42</sup> and *Les Lettres à mon fils* in 1759.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1760s, d'Épinay's literary activities continued, as she developed friendships with Diderot, Galiani, and her relationship with Grimm; she collaborated in many literary endeavors with the three of them.<sup>44</sup> In 1769, Grimm left for Germany and Galiani returned to his native Italy.<sup>45</sup> Already a productive letter writer with many correspondents, their absence gave d'Épinay the opportunity to become an even more prolific correspondent through her exchanges with them. Before Galiani's *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* was published in 1770, d'Épinay had joined forces with Diderot to re-write them.<sup>46</sup> Another well-known collaboration involving all four authors was a kind of dialogue on paper, published in the *Correspondance littéraire* in 1772, documenting their reactions to Antoine-Léonard Thomas' *Essai sur le caractère, les mœurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les différents siècles*.<sup>47</sup> D'Épinay's stance was that so-called feminine characteristics such as weakness did not come from nature but were instilled in girls by

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<sup>41</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 32. D'Épinay's heroine Madame de Montbrillant takes her name from the location of the press; Trouille notes that the name is significant for its link to publishing. See Trouille, *Sexual Politics*, 143. Ironically, *Montbrillant* was not published during d'Épinay's lifetime.

<sup>42</sup> We may never know if this claim was made in earnest. It may be part of the phenomenon Mary McAlpin describes regarding women writers who claimed to be upset that their letters were leaked when that was precisely their aim all along. See Weinreb 32.

<sup>43</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 127.

<sup>47</sup> See Badinter, ed., *Qu'est-ce qu'une femme?* See also Trouille, "Sexual/Textual Politics in the Enlightenment."

society;<sup>48</sup> thus in a real way she anticipated Simone de Beauvoir's famous adage from *The Second Sex*: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."<sup>49</sup>

While Grimm was traveling, d'Épinay played a major editorial role in producing the *Correspondance littéraire*, with Diderot, and provided some of its content.<sup>50</sup> Her contributions included reviews of plays,<sup>51</sup> letters to her friends, and excerpts of educational works like *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, *Les Conversations d'Émilie* (see below), and two-thirds of *Les Lettres à mon fils*.<sup>52</sup>

We also have evidence that d'Épinay wrote three *comédies*, although only two of them have come down to us. Diderot mentions the first, *L'Agent de lui-même*, in a letter from 1761, when he sent the play back to d'Épinay without having corrected it as she had wished. No known copy of this play survives. The work was possibly a parody of or response to Rousseau's *L'Amant de lui-même*.<sup>53</sup> The other two plays are *L'Amitié de deux jolies femmes*, which documents the vicissitudes of a friendship between women that initially burned bright but was, unfortunately, short-lived, and *Un rêve de Mlle Clairon*, whose title refers to the famous actress from the *Comédie française* and which presents thoughts on proper acting techniques. Both of these plays date from 1771 and appeared in the *Correspondance littéraire*,<sup>54</sup> where they were

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<sup>48</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 137.

<sup>49</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Trans. Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, xviii.

<sup>50</sup> See Kölving, "La présence de Madame d'Épinay" and Caron *Vie de société*. See also: Weinreb, *Eagle*, 145-147, 163-166.

<sup>51</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 146.

<sup>52</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> David, *L'Autobiographie de convenance*, 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> These two plays were also published by Maurice Tourneux in 1885 (David 21). See Mme d'Épinay, *L'Amitié de deux jolies Femmes* suivi de *Un Rêve de Mlle de Clairon*, publiées par M. Tourneux, Librairie des Bibliophiles, Collection "les Chef-d'œuvres inconnus," Paris, 1885. *Un Rêve de Mlle de Clairon* was also published in d'Épinay and Galiani's *Correspondance*: see Ferdinando Galiani – Louise d'Épinay, *Correspondance*, Desjonquères, Paris, 1992-1997 (David, *Autobiographie*, 23).

described as “dialogues.”<sup>55</sup> D’Épinay’s desire to remain anonymous as the author of *L’Amitié* was not respected.<sup>56</sup>

Another dimension of d’Épinay’s collaborative literary activity is to be found in her generosity to other writers and artists. Although not technically a *salonnière*,<sup>57</sup> she did host such well-known figures as Rousseau and Mozart, who stayed with her after the death of his mother in 1778,<sup>58</sup> and she presided over gatherings of her closest associates, whom she referred to as her “bears,” and other intellectuals. She counted, among members of her circle, Grimm, Diderot, d’Alembert, d’Holbach, Marivaux, Charles Pinot Duclos, Marmontel, Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny, Michel-Jean Sedaine, Saint-Lambert, Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard, Damilaville, Louis Dupin de Francueil, Aimable le Roy, Raynal, Galiani, Voisenon, Bernard-Joseph Saurin, le baron de Creutz, le marquis de Mora, le comte de Fuentès, le baron Gleichen, and Stormont.

While her male colleagues heaped praise upon her, certain of them still set her apart because she was a woman.<sup>59</sup> In spite of her enormous talent, d’Épinay could never escape being

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<sup>55</sup> David 22-23. Dialogues were an important genre in eighteenth-century France, embraced by many of d’Épinay’s contemporaries. On Diderot and others’ use of dialogue, see, for example, Sherman, *Diderot and the Art of Dialogue*. Sherman, “In Defense of the Dialogue: Diderot, Shaftesbury, and Galiani.” Schorr, “Caverns and the Dialogic Structure of the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*.” McDonald, “Le Dialogue, l’utopie: *Le Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* par Denis Diderot.” Mat, “*Le Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*: Une Aporie polyphonique.” Adams, *Bibliographie d’ouvrages français en forme de dialogue 1700-1750*. McDonald, *The Dialogue of Writing: Essays in Eighteenth-Century French Literature*.

<sup>56</sup> David, *Autobiographie*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Adelson and Letzter, “Madame d’Épinay, Mozart, et la Symphonie ‘parisienne,’” 250. Mozart had met d’Épinay on a visit to Paris in 1763 (252).

<sup>59</sup> Rousseau, for example, in his *Confessions*, dismissed d’Épinay’s writing as mere trifles she was too eager to show off and in the same breath said she was so flat-chested he would not consider her a woman. It is interesting to note that in this passage, Rousseau mentions d’Épinay was working on novels during the period when he lived at the Hermitage. Perhaps he was thinking of *Montbrillant*. See Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Confessions*. Paris: H. Launette et Cie; 751. Originally published 1789. *ARTFL*. Even Voltaire, who called her a real *philosophe*,

judged for how well she inspired sexual desire in addition to her writing. Some later critics have been offended by the idea a woman could be a *philosophe* and have clung to her gender and to her biological sex as a way to diminish her contributions.<sup>60</sup> Ruth Plaut Weinreb provides an in-depth examination of how d'Épinay has systematically been denied the status of *philosophe*. And yet, Weinreb argues, d'Épinay performed the same intellectual work as the male *philosophes* and shared the same intellectual projects and preoccupations.<sup>61</sup> In particular, d'Épinay was interested in changing institutions, especially through education, to make society better. She was interested in the pursuit of happiness, in finding out the secret to living a meaningful life. Above all, she wanted her work to be useful to others.

D'Épinay's granddaughter Émilie de Belsunce was born in 1768;<sup>62</sup> her name would later be immortalized in one of her grandmother's most well known educational works, *Les Conversations d'Émilie*.<sup>63</sup> In letters to Galiani, d'Épinay mentions that these *Conversations* were inspired by actual exchanges with her granddaughter.<sup>64</sup> In 1774, the first version of *Conversations* was published, comprising 12 conversations, written in dialogue form, of a mother with her daughter, Émilie. The conversations themselves are explicitly used as a pedagogical tool to teach the daughter how to think critically, ask the right questions, make wise decisions, decide whom to trust, and learn the ways of the world so that she can comport herself

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also used the term flirtatiously, waxed poetic on her beauty, and fantasized about her breasts. See Weinreb, "Double Vision," 397-398.

<sup>60</sup> In *Les Femmes philosophes*, for example, P. Lescure explicitly ties her reproductive capacities and functions to her literary output, describing d'Épinay as "a hen [...] hatching articles and laying books." Lescure, P. *Les Femmes philosophes*. Cited in Weinreb, *Eagle*, 5. The translation borrowed above is Weinreb's.

<sup>61</sup> See "The Philosophe: Virtue and *Utilité*" in Weinreb, *Eagle*, 99-114.

<sup>62</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> See D'Épinay, *Les Conversations d'Émilie*. All references to this work are from the edition by Rosena Davison.

<sup>64</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 41n32. See: Épinay to Galiani 15 November 1774, 5 December 1774, and 26 May 1777.

morally and to her advantage in polite society. *Conversations* values hard work, self-discipline, and perseverance. Émilie is also the protagonist's name in *Montbrillant*. This name seems to have held great significance for d'Épinay, and her use of it twice for a main character lends credence to my theory that *Montbrillant* was an earlier educational novel, and that the *Conversations* represent rather a continuation and evolution of her ideas. The conversations span approximately five years' time, and follow Émilie from age five to almost ten. *Conversations'* expanded second edition, including 20 conversations, was published in 1781. The work was awarded the Montyon Prize, the Académie française's *prix d'utilité*, two years later, in January 1783, over Stéphanie de Genlis' educational work *Adèle et Théodore*. Mme d'Épinay died in April of that year.<sup>65</sup>

Looking back over d'Épinay's publication record, we can see that with the exception of *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, she published only when she claimed her work was intended for a small number of *destinataires*, as was the case with *Mes Moments heureux*, or anonymously, as in the case of her contributions to the *Correspondance littéraire* (although some readers may have known her identity), and many of her collaborations with Diderot and Galiani. Some of her work was not published until after her death, including her correspondence with Galiani and *Montbrillant*.<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps a combination of critics' treatment of d'Épinay and her own reticence to publish—influenced as it was by her society's views on what was proper for women and nobles—are to blame for what has happened to her works since her death. D'Épinay became somewhat

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<sup>65</sup> See Weinreb, *Eagle*, 3; 42-43.

<sup>66</sup> The first two volumes of her letters to Galiani, written between 1769 and 1772, were published in Italian as *Lettere inedite* in 1929; her letters to Galiani during the period spanning 1773-1782 were published in 1932 (Weinreb, *Eagle*, 3). Readers today know the five-volume edition of Daniel Maggetti and Georges Dulac: see Galiani and d'Épinay, *Correspondance*.

famous in nineteenth-century France because of her association with Rousseau: abridged versions of *Montbrillant*, first published under the title of d'Épinay's *Mémoires*, sold well and caused a great deal of scandal, owing to the work's discussion of what was presumed to be the author's own relationship with Jean-Jacques. Although its primary interest to nineteenth-century readers and editors was the work's accuracy—or lack thereof—in describing Rousseau and other famous historical figures, rather than its literary merit, *Montbrillant* did garner praise from Sainte-Beuve and the Goncourts, although Sainte-Beuve chiefly applauds the work's portrait of eighteenth-century *mœurs*. D'Épinay was ahead of her time in incarnating the nineteenth century's ideal of a mother who took charge of educating her own children, and *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, a work that provides a model mother-educator, was still being reprinted in 1822.<sup>67</sup> In the twentieth century, editor Georges Roth published the first unabridged edition of *Montbrillant* in 1951,<sup>68</sup> which was followed by Élisabeth Badinter's edition in 1989.<sup>69</sup> However, apart from a small number of studies, d'Épinay's work passed back into the shadows, and scholarship generally focused on her relationship to Rousseau.<sup>70</sup>

Now that we have briefly considered each of d'Épinay's works, we will examine *Montbrillant*'s themes in detail.

### *Montbrillant*'s Themes

*Montbrillant*'s main themes are all related to money, marriage, and education. The work explores the consequences of being an impecunious noble or member of the upper elite of the

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<sup>67</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 468-470.

<sup>68</sup> D'Épinay, *Les Pseudo-Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay: Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*. Ed. Georges Roth.

<sup>69</sup> D'Épinay, *Les Contre-Confessions: Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, ed. Élisabeth Badinter.

<sup>70</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 474.



bourgeoisie. The novel's main character, Émilie de Montbrillant, can be considered a member of either of those classes. The work focuses on what can happen to poor noble women, especially, who do not have enough money for a dowry to marry. In eighteenth-century French society, these women did not really have the option not to marry, unless they became nuns or lived as laywomen in convents. Although Mme de Maintenon gave dowries to the poor noble and bourgeoisie girls at Saint-Cyr, in hopes that if they did not enter into convents, they would use their education to instruct their families,<sup>71</sup> most women without dowries were not able to profit from that solution, and these were women whom the rest of society considered useless. In a letter dated April 1774, Rousseau's correspondent Henriette \*\*\* explains that being an unmarried poor noble woman in eighteenth-century France is like being a stone deemed unfit for use in constructing a building:

Moi, isolée, je ne suis d'aucun sexe, je suis seulement un être pensant et souffrant, qui reste là aux alentours d'une société où on ne m'a point donné de place, comme une pierre, que l'on n'a point employée, reste près d'un bâtiment dont elle n'a pu faire partie. Elle n'est ni pierre d'angle, ni pierre d'appui, on n'en a rien fait, elle n'est seulement qu'une pierre que l'on range pour ne pas embarrasser les passants.<sup>72</sup>

The default option for women in this situation was the convent, whether they had a sense of vocation or not. In *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, d'Épinay presents the convent as a punishment for women whose behavior was socially so unacceptable that they could not marry,<sup>73</sup> and we can think of Diderot's character Suzanne Simonin in *La Religieuse* as an example of a woman who knows she does not have a vocation, but whose family forces her into the convent anyway,

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<sup>71</sup> Gréard, *L'éducation des femmes par les femmes*, 135.

<sup>72</sup> Buffenoir, ed. *J.-J. Rousseau et Henriette, jeune Parisienne inconnue: Manuscrit inédit du XVIIIe siècle*, 10-11.

<sup>73</sup> See D'Épinay, *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, 59.

supposedly because her very existence presents an economic challenge for them.<sup>74</sup> For women like Suzanne, marriage is preferable, and in *Montbrillant*, it is the goal for Émilie as well as for her daughter Pauline, both of whom struggle to meet the financial requirements necessary for a dowry.

*Montbrillant* is a veritable catalogue of what can go wrong, at every stage from brokering a marriage on, each character representing a specific bad situation that can occur.<sup>75</sup> Like many other eighteenth-century works, the novel shows that men can enter lightly into marriage because they have a relatively greater degree of freedom and many more legal and economic rights than women, whose entire lives are completely defined and circumscribed by their marriages, and who have little recourse when trapped in a bad marriage. With few legal and financial rights, and no legal ability to divorce their husbands,<sup>76</sup> *Montbrillant* shows how women can nonetheless arm themselves with knowledge in order to make the most of what limited rights they do have and to

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<sup>74</sup> See Diderot, *Contes et romans*. It was not actually for economic reasons, though; her mother wanted Suzanne to go into the convent to expiate her sins for her. Mary Angelo finds that whereas male-authored works from before the Revolution conceive of the convent as a negatively-charged space, the site of the forced vocation narrative, in later works by women authors, such as those by Adélaïde de Souza (1761-1836), the convent instead takes on a positive valence as a space where women learn to make the kinds of sacrifices their families will need from them in the post-revolutionary period (iv). See Angelo, *Force of Habit: How the Convent Shapes the Family in the Fiction of Adélaïde de Souza*, especially Section V, “The Ancien Régime Literary Convent” (51-59) in Chapter 1, “Le Goût du Cloître.”

<sup>75</sup> Besides Émilie’s marriage to Montbrillant, other representative examples include M. de Lisieux and Mimi: love on both sides, but Mimi’s family does not consider M. de Lisieux as good enough; M. and Mme de Sallye: the husband is abusive and will not even let his wife see her dying aunt or have one minute alone to write to her relatives; Mlle Darcy and the Chevalier Le Maire: dishonored by the Chevalier at the age of 14, no one will ever marry Mlle Darcy, who must live as a *pensionnaire* in a convent for life; M. and Mme de Ménil: Mme de Ménil does not love her husband and cheats on him; Émilie and the nobleman: she does not have enough money to marry him.

<sup>76</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 59.

find other satisfying resources, like study,<sup>77</sup> that will help them to tolerate a lifetime spent in a miserable, inescapable situation and succeed in making a fulfilling life for themselves and their children in spite of it. Ideally, however, a bad marriage is altogether avoidable, and d'Épinay shows how it can be avoided, through the right kind of education. D'Épinay intends a course of education quite different from the normal one that aristocratic girls were given, which d'Épinay portrays as teaching dissimulation and artifice. In d'Épinay's ideal educational program, sincerity is the chief value, skill, and tool that women must develop and use.

From the outset, the concept of sincerity plays a key role in Mme d'Épinay's model, and she charges it with a great deal of transformative social potential. First, speaking sincerely about their experiences, as d'Épinay's protagonist Émilie does, would allow women to tear the veil off of all the fakeness in their society, especially as concerns their experiences of love and marriage, and as a result, they would be able to hold others, principally men, accountable for not keeping their word, especially financially. It would allow women living within a society whose patriarchal structure keeps them perpetually at odds with one another to realize that there are many other women who have shared experiences similar to their own, and might lead to greater woman-to-woman cooperation. Sincerity would also allow women with no money to marry, because sincerity would in essence be worth much more than capital. D'Épinay would completely replace the dowry-based marriage system with a system in which marriages would be based on intellectual and moral compatibility and merit would be more important than money. Finally, sincerity would change the nature of a husband and wife's relationship to one another,

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<sup>77</sup> D'Épinay's views on the importance of study for women are similar to those of other eighteenth-century authors, including Mme du Châtelet, Rousseau's correspondent Henriette \*\*\*, Fontenelle, and Mme de Staël. See Du Châtelet, *Discours sur le bonheur*, 20-21. See Séité, ed., *Rousseau – Henriette\*\*\*: Correspondance (1764-1770)*. See Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. See Staël, *De la littérature*, 78.

because in an age when married people could be ridiculed for loving their spouses too much<sup>78</sup> and marriage contracts were often entered into with no intention of fidelity on the part of the participants,<sup>79</sup> sincerity would become the basis of their marriage, which would require them to take their vows much more seriously. Such an overhaul in the nature of marriage would lead to concrete financial changes within marriage, as well as a less hierarchical and more equal partnership between spouses. These consequences would extend beyond individual families, both concretely and symbolically.

D'Épinay makes her points about marriage, money, a woman's place in the world, sincerity, and education by presenting readers with the exemplary life of Émilie, a poor noble, whom the reader meets at the age of 10, when her father has just died and she is forced to rely on the charity of her uncle and the grudging generosity of her aunt, and whom the reader follows until Émilie's death at approximately age 35 or 40. *Montbrillant* is organized chronologically and chronicles Émilie's struggles to obtain an education and to learn to distinguish between those she can safely trust and those who wish her ill. Readers follow Émilie through her adolescence and adulthood, through her unhappy and abusive marriage and financial struggles, through childbirth and a separation of her assets from those of her husband; they witness her "mis-education" and discovery of the principles that will become the basis of her educational program when she becomes an educator in her own right.

Questions of sincerity, dissimulation, and money are at the forefront throughout Émilie's development, as she learns to temper her too-open confidences, her too-trusting nature, and to overcome her training to please everyone around her with no thought given to her own wants and

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<sup>78</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 116 (after *Montbrillant* 1:287).

<sup>79</sup> Badinter describes these differences between Émilie and her husband in *Montbrillant*, although she attributes these differences to d'Épinay and her husband, as the difference between bourgeois love and faithfulness (d'Épinay) and 18<sup>th</sup>-c. *libertinage* (M. d'Épinay). *Ambition*, 112.

needs. As the novel progresses, she gradually emerges as a capable and confident woman, able to articulate her thoughts in her own unique voice. Readers experience the process of Émilie's development as it unfolds, largely through the letters that she exchanges with her various family members, acquaintances, and friends.

Of particular importance to Émilie's education and personal growth are those letters she writes to and receives from two people: first, her tutor, M. de Lisieux, who is especially charged with advising her on financial matters and who seems to view himself as an all-around mentor, providing Émilie with practical advice on how to manage herself in society, and later, how to manage her money and her husband, while urging her always to act in a manner consistent with her values, throughout the entire work. Lisieux, who fills the role of compiler of the letters and narrator in the version of the novel d'Épinay left behind at her death,<sup>80</sup> is also one of Mme de Montbrillant's principal epistolary interlocutors. *Montbrillant* is composed entirely of letters and journal passages, with the occasional explanatory or narrative passage between them, written by Lisieux. Of the work's 733 letters and journal passages, 169 are written by Émilie to Lisieux and 48 are letters written by Lisieux.<sup>81</sup> Thus, nearly 30% of the letters issue from this relationship. This count does not include M. de Lisieux's narrative passages between letters, nor does it account for the fact that Émilie's journal passages – all of them sent to M. de Lisieux – are some of the lengthiest in the book.<sup>82</sup> In adulthood, Émilie finds a second moral advisor and confidant for the ups-and-downs of everyday life in her lover M. Volx.

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<sup>80</sup> There is evidence that d'Épinay may have planned to replace Lisieux as compiler and narrator with Émilie herself.

<sup>81</sup> The occasional letter is addressed to M. de Lisieux by a character other than Émilie; I have not counted these letters in the total.

<sup>82</sup> This measure of importance puts all letters on equal footing, no matter their length. A truer index of M. de Lisieux's importance would be to count the pages or words involved in this exchange relative to the total work.

In adulthood, Émilie stands out from her contemporaries in three major ways. First, although she holds some views related to money that were characteristic of the old nobility as well as some values more associated with the bourgeoisie,<sup>83</sup> Émilie's views on money are quite unique for her time.<sup>84</sup> She and her husband are from two different classes with contrasting values related to money. Émilie comes from the provincial *petite noblesse*, and can also be described as coming from the *ancienne noblesse*. Her husband, meanwhile, is a non-noble member of the upper bourgeoisie,<sup>85</sup> a *nouveau riche* who spends money prodigiously, whose womanizing and luxurious tastes imperil his entire family's financial future. Although he is a poor steward of his family's money, Émilie is always beholden to her abusive husband because he is rich and she is poor; she is supposed to be grateful to him for having married her. Émilie's critique of her husband's misuse of money sets her apart from her contemporaries.<sup>86</sup> For Émilie, spending money one does not have is tantamount to being insincere.

Second, she is virtually alone in her time and class in wanting to educate her children herself.<sup>87</sup> *Montbrillant* describes her struggles to win the right to educate her son and daughter, and major portions of the work discuss her plans for educating them. Émilie largely loses the fight to oversee her son's education until his moral and intellectual development have been

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<sup>83</sup> I use the terms *bourgeois* and *bourgeoisie* especially to refer to certain values like fidelity in marriage and how money should be used or treated. However, the term *bourgeoisie* is not uncontroversial. Interested readers will find a comprehensive discussion in Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*.

<sup>84</sup> In this paragraph, my characterizations of Émilie and her husband's class and their financial attitudes draw upon Élisabeth Badinter's analysis of *Montbrillant* in *Ambition*. (See especially 60-64.) Badinter relates this information as though it is about d'Épinay herself. She gets the information, however, from an autobiographical reading of *Montbrillant*, so we know it is true of Émilie.

<sup>85</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 206.

<sup>86</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 63-64.

<sup>87</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 123.

delayed by the poor instructional methods of others,<sup>88</sup> and d'Épinay shows how the educational path proposed by Émilie's husband ultimately leads to failure; after spending years wasting time with an idiot preceptor who is wholly uninterested in his education, Émilie's son ends up unprincipled, undisciplined, and unsuited for civic life. Once he is delivered into Émilie's capable hands, however, he starts to show some promise.

On the other hand, Émilie is left alone to develop an educational curriculum for her daughter, Pauline, and with the help of a governess is able to implement it. Although the governess, Mlle Durand, spends a great deal of time educating Pauline, Émilie spends time teaching her daughter every day as well. Émilie is clearly in charge of the educational process; she writes to Mlle Durand with specific instructions for how Pauline is to spend her days, in a slightly modified, expanded, and fictionalized version of the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*.

Compared to the education offered by the preceptor, Émilie's method is a triumph. Intelligent and caring, her daughter Pauline is everything her son is not. While other young women in Pauline's financially precarious situation turn to other substitutes for wealth like beauty and musical talent in order to entice a man with financial means to propose marriage,<sup>89</sup> the goal of Émilie's educational program for Pauline is to make her daughter exceptionally sincere, for Émilie believes that the practice of sincerity will enable Pauline to get married and subsequently lead a happy married life, and this in spite of not having any money or property. Women educating women is thus a major theme of the novel. Not only does Émilie educate

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<sup>88</sup> The corrective tutelage d'Épinay is able to give her son is too little, too late. We will see that one of *Montbrillant's* genres is the *fable*, and part of the fable's lesson is that you have to teach or form children from an early age, especially when it comes to their moral development. Waiting as long as Rousseau's Émile waits to develop these capacities is too long.

<sup>89</sup> *Les arts d'agrément* included "music, drawing, embroidery, and dance" (Trouille, *Sexual Politics*, 97).

Pauline, but the work also provides an education for women readers, as well as a model for them to follow, and it contains persuasive arguments in favor of educating their daughters themselves.

Émilie is also exceptional for her time and class in believing in the value of monogamy,<sup>90</sup> and this value is a direct result of her belief in the primacy of sincerity. If someone gives their word to love and be faithful, Émilie believes that person must stick to it. Émilie was unusual in her time in being able to marry for love.<sup>91</sup> Although her marriage ultimately disappoints her, because her husband cheats and is insincere, irresponsible with his money, and abusive, she retains marrying for love as an ideal. It may seem paradoxical, then, that the novel follows her through three relationships, the first with M. de Montbrillant, her husband, and the second two with two lovers, Formeuse and Volx. Once she overcomes her deeply-set scruples at the urging of her sometime-friend Mlle Darcy and engages in her first extramarital affair, with Formeuse, she hopes to find in him a surrogate husband and in the relationship a substitute for a monogamous marriage. Her hopes are dashed, however. Émilie's husband mistreats her in many ways, and then her first lover Formeuse deceives her. These two men prove themselves to be ultimately unworthy of Émilie precisely because they are both insincere. With her second lover Volx, on the other hand, Émilie builds a relationship based on sincerity, which stands in stark contrast to the marriages and affairs of everyone around them, and she at last finds the surrogate marriage she was seeking. This relationship also provides the model for the kind of qualities Émilie desires for Pauline to find within her eventual marriage.

Put in the broadest terms, *Montbrillant* views sincerity as a key for solving many of the problems caused by the social structures of eighteenth-century France, especially for women

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<sup>90</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 112.

<sup>91</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 54.



who need to get married and want to have a happy married life. D'Épinay highlights this theme from the very outset, in the prefaces to the novel, which we will examine next.

### Prefaces and Other Paratextual Materials: At Least Two Ways of Reading *Montbrillant*

There exist two prefaces to *Montbrillant*, which give clues about the work's aims, and from them we can draw out two main motives, one educational, the other justificatory. Although critics have focused almost exclusively on the exculpatory aims as proof that *Montbrillant* is autobiographical, the work's educational impetus is just as clear. Both prefaces, it should be noted, were set aside and unused (*Montbrillant*, 1:3). Thus, while we must be cognizant of the fact that perhaps d'Épinay was not satisfied with them, they nonetheless provide an excellent means for understanding how d'Épinay frames *Montbrillant*'s content, and, because they are included at the beginning of the published editions, they inevitably shape each reader's interpretation of the work.

The first preface comes from a novel d'Épinay projected to write whose protagonist was to be called Mme de Rambures. But in the manuscript, this name is scratched out and Mme de Montbrillant is written in in the space between the lines.<sup>92</sup> This preface is narrated from the perspective of Mme de Montbrillant's tutor, M. de Lisieux, who addresses the reader after Mme de Montbrillant's death. The work's first stated aim is to justify Mme de Montbrillant's behavior and choices in the eyes of the public, who do not have a good opinion of her. Her tutor believes that if the truth were known, the public would not condemn her for what appears to be her lack of principles: "Mon but, en publiant l'histoire de ses malheurs, est de la justifier aux yeux du public du soupçon de légèreté, de coquetterie et de manque de caractère dont j'entends encore

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<sup>92</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:4-5.

quelquefois offenser sa mémoire” (1:4). Lisieux reveals the dual nature of his role as tutor, right at the outset of this text: he had “le soin de ses intérêts,” which means that not only was his role to be a friend and, especially, a moral advisor or teacher to Mme de Montbrillant, but also to make sure she made the right financial decisions. Her tutor can vouch for Mme de Montbrillant’s sincerity, because he knows the innermost workings of her heart (“l’amitié et l’entière confiance qu’elle avait en moi, m’ont mis à portée de suivre et de connaître les mouvements les plus cachés de cette malheureuse femme” (1:5)). He proves that he is a reliable source by backing up his claims to know Émilie so well by the degree of detail and insight into her life that he provides to the reader.<sup>93</sup> But he also serves as financial *garant*, meaning he can back Émilie financially as well. M. de Lisieux essentially is responsible for three things: Émilie’s sincerity, her education, and her financial dealings. Lisieux is just one of the characters d’Épinay uses to create an equation between these three elements. The idea of justification Lisieux presents in the first preface can lead us to think, as many scholars have, that *Montbrillant* must be a sort of response to, or rather preemptive precursor to, Rousseau’s *Confessions*, but this idea bears further examination.

This first narrative rationale of *Montbrillant* – justification in the eyes of the public – is followed by a second motive, that of education:

Ces mémoires doivent aussi servir de leçon aux mères de famille. On y verra le danger d’une éducation timide et incertaine, et la nécessité d’étudier le caractère d’un enfant pour former d’après cette connaissance un plan d’éducation invariable. Celle qu’avait

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<sup>93</sup> Émilie and M. de Lisieux often refer to Lisieux’s longstanding relationship with Émilie’s family and frequently comment on upcoming or past visits where they have seen each other in person and have spent considerable time together, underscoring for the reader Lisieux’s knowledge of and reliability as a judge of Émilie’s character. Early on in the novel, however, M. de Lisieux becomes an unwelcome visitor after his failed marriage proposal to Émilie’s cousin Mimi, and this episode handily serves as a pretext for Lisieux and Émilie to write each other more letters, which in turn allows d’Épinay’s narrative structure to function. (Eventually, a kind of *détente* takes place and Lisieux is once again welcomed into the family.)

reçue Mme de Montbrillant avait si bien déguisé ou affaibli ses dispositions naturelles qu'il a fallu un nombre d'années passé dans le malheur pour lui rendre la fermeté de son caractère.<sup>94</sup>

In this passage, we see elements that remind us of prefaces to works like *Manon Lescaut*,<sup>95</sup> which promises to entertain the public with “agreeable” reading, not just for the sake of entertainment, but because it will teach them something by providing an example for readers to follow, or rather, not follow, that will help guide their actions when faced with situations in which their past experiences or bland, abstract moral platitudes will not suffice as a guide.<sup>96</sup> It is similar to how Flaubert’s defense attorney Jules Senard would later frame *Madame Bovary* at its trial: bad deeds are recounted, but they provide an educational lesson for women; rather than corrupting them, the consequences of scandalous content will horrify them into behavior befitting proper ladies.<sup>97</sup> Here, instead of providing an example that will teach women to comport themselves according to society’s expectations or demands, d’Épinay implies that women’s characters naturally are steadfast and courageous (in other words, they have “fermeté” [“courage in adversity,” 1762],<sup>98</sup>) and only become weakened through societal influences.<sup>99</sup> Thus what is being taught is not how to adhere to norms of femininity, but rather how to formulate an individualized plan of education tailored to meet the specific needs of an individual girl. Émilie in the end succeeds in getting her own *fermeté* back, too, and *Montbrillant* shows this process.

The text is specifically aimed at women, and women who are situated (or can become situated, as

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<sup>94</sup> *Montbrillant* 1:4. Roth notes that this second paragraph was added to the rest of the preface later: as evidence, he cites that it was written in the margin and used the name Montbrillant to begin with instead of crossing out Rambure, which we still find in the following paragraph; however, portions at the end of the preface use Montbrillant first thing.

<sup>95</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 74.

<sup>96</sup> See Prévost, *Manon Lescaut*, xvi-xix.

<sup>97</sup> Ladenson, *Dirt for Art’s Sake*, 26. See also 21-22.

<sup>98</sup> See Fermeté, *Dictionnaires d’autrefois*.

<sup>99</sup> See Weinreb, *Eagle*, 51.

the text will illustrate) to undertake their children's education themselves. Although it has traditionally been considered a counterpart to Rousseau's *Confessions*, in several respects, and especially in its emphasis on developing a plan of education to suit a particular child, *Montbrillant* should be read alongside *Émile*, and perhaps was one of Rousseau's sources of inspiration for this work.<sup>100</sup>

In the first preface, Mme de Montbrillant's tutor describes his role in preparing her correspondence for the reader's eyes: he is both compiler and narrator. He has purportedly tracked down letters from many interlocutors and assembled them in order ("la collection des lettres que j'ai recueilli (*sic*) soigneusement"), but in addition he proposes to explain any gaps between the letters, filling in missing information, and adding commentary. M. de Lisieux stresses the truthfulness of the account we are about to read, which comes from the letters' authenticity. He evokes "les couleurs du tableau que je veux présenter dans la plus exacte vérité," reassures the reader, "je ne veux m'écarter en rien de la vérité," and says that, as the letters are original, "la vérité fait leur passeport" (1:5). It is for this reason, he says, that he did not remove any details that might seem superfluous. Besides their authenticity, another selling point of these letters is their particular quality that comes from Mme de Montbrillant's very soul: "le naturel, la sensibilité, la crédulité et la douceur de son âme font le caractère de ses lettres." To this list of qualities, the manuscript originally added "La grande facilité qu'elle avait à écrire" and also, although it was finally erased, "la franchise," which was replaced by "le courage et la fermeté qui étaient la base de son caractère..." (1:5). These qualities are the ones *Émilie* starts out having and, through effort and self-cultivation, is able to regain after having been denatured

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<sup>100</sup> Scholars have not discussed *Montbrillant* in connection with *Émile*. Instead, they have focused on the later *Conversations d'Émilie* as having been a response to *Émile*. See, for example, Trouille, "La Femme Mal Mariée"; Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*.

by her society. These terms – facility in writing, *franchise*, *courage*, and *fermeté* – are close to sincerity in d'Épinay's thought. For d'Épinay, as for La Rochefoucauld, a weak person cannot be sincere.<sup>101</sup> D'Épinay will show readers the necessity of developing the qualities of strength and sincerity in tandem with one another.

The first preface ends with a straightforward overview of Mme de Montbrillant's family and financial situation at the point when the story begins. This paragraph, left incomplete, announces many of the themes that will be central to the work:

Le Mqs de G\*\*\* [Gondrecourt], père de Me de Montbrillant, fut fait lieutenant gén après la bataille de \*\*\* en l'année \*\*\*. On lui donna le commandement de Phalsebourg (*sic*) en 17\*\*. Il vint établir à Paris sa femme et Émilie, sa fille, pour lui donner une éducation conforme à sa naissance. Il mourut dans le voyage. Émilie n'avait alors que dix ans. L'amitié qui me liait depuis longtemps à cette famille me fit choisir pour son tuteur, conjointement avec la marqse de Gondrecourt, sa mère. Le marq, qui avait toujours vécu honorablement, ne laissa à sa fille que des dettes et un patrimoine de trois mille livres de rente. La marqse n'avait eu en mariage qu'une pension du roi de 2.000 lv., de sorte q (1:5)

This briskly factual paragraph states everything we need to know about Émilie's station in life and the challenges she will face. Financial concerns are of paramount importance, and d'Épinay gives us the exact sums we need to know. Had *Montbrillant* been published in the eighteenth century, these amounts would have been meaningful to readers who would have been able to surmise a great deal about the conditions of Émilie's life based on the numbers, which additionally create an *effet du réel*. Émilie's father, a good subject of the government and an honorable man, has left her nothing but debts and a very small inheritance; he will be but the first in a long line of men, including the king, who will let her down financially over the course of her lifetime. It is important to note that at the time of her father's death, he had intended for Émilie to receive "une éducation conforme à sa naissance," in other words, an aristocratic education

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<sup>101</sup> See La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes et réflexions morales*, No. 323.

with several *maîtres* teaching different subjects. What follows the preface will in fact be the story of Émilie's education, not the one her father had intended, but the real education Émilie receives after he dies, leaving her bereft. Her mother and tutor, who split her financial guardianship, will also largely split oversight of Émilie's education, although, as we will see, a great-aunt, Maman de Beaufort; a governess, Mlle Anselme; a convent, a priest, and others, will also have roles to play in educating Émilie.

In a work in which mothers educating their daughters is a major theme, we may wonder why d'Épinay chose to give Émilie a male tutor and to give him such a prominent role. He seems to contribute much more that is of value to Émilie's education than her mother does. The answer is, I believe, twofold. First, Émilie's father dies while she is a minor, and M. de Lisieux and Émilie's mother are jointly appointed as her financial guardians until she reaches the age of civil majority. In this sense, M. de Lisieux performs certain duties Émilie's father would have performed. The provision for orphans (in other words, children who have lost both parents, or only one parent, especially when it is the father, as is the case for Émilie) to be assigned a guardian was codified under law, and therefore d'Épinay's inclusion of a male tutor has verisimilitude. Under the *Ancien régime*, a person was considered a minor until the age of 25.<sup>102</sup> It makes sense, therefore, that Émilie would have relied on her tutor's advice even after her marriage. Second, d'Épinay presents M. de Lisieux as a model educator and Émilie's mother as an example of an educator who fails at her task. Émilie's mother thus provides a negative example for women readers to avoid emulating, a foil who makes Émilie's success as an educator stand out all the more strikingly. It is, however, interesting to note that d'Épinay seems to have planned to reduce M. de Lisieux's role in the novel in favor of Émilie's. The second

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<sup>102</sup> See the *Explication de l'ordonnance de Blois. Par feu Noble François de Boutaric, Professeur en Droit François en l'Université de Toulouse*, 71-76.

preface shows that Émilie was to have taken over as *Montbrillant*'s narrator. At the time of her death, d'Épinay had not rewritten the rest of the novel this way; perhaps that is one reason why she considered the work incomplete.

The second preface,<sup>103</sup> which d'Épinay entitled “CAHIER TROUVÉ DANS LES PAPIERS DE MADAME DE MONTBRILLANT,” is written from the heroine's point of view and addressed to her tutor when she senses that her end is near. She wishes to give him the entirety of her correspondence. This time it is Mme de Montbrillant herself who serves as the compiler and commentator on her letters, and we see some of the same themes from the earlier preface resurface, especially the concern with her reputation in the eyes of her contemporaries, and even posterity, as we may infer from her reference to leaving these letters behind so that others can erase her bad reputation after her death:

Je me dois, et je dois à ceux qui m'honorent encore de leur estime et de leur tendresse, de leur laisser les moyens de détruire après moi la calomnie par le récit le plus sincère des différents événements dans lesquels j'ai eu presque toujours les apparences contre moi. La timidité, la honte et quelquefois l'honnêteté et l'indulgence pour les autres, m'ont imposé silence et m'ont portée à me laisser condamner sans me plaindre.

Hers will be the most sincere retelling possible; thus, sincerity plays a major role in Mme de Montbrillant's method of justifying herself (“C'est à vous surtout, ô mon Tuteur, que je veux paraître telle que je suis, et aux yeux de qui il m'importe de me justifier”). She will expose the truth behind the appearances. Émilie is, herself, a complex representation of sincerity. There is an echo of Lisieux's concern with authenticity: Émilie states that she has kept the letters “soigneusement” and that she will include her friends' letters, even if they are not, strictly speaking, necessary to the story.

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<sup>103</sup> *Montbrillant* 1:6-8.

In contrast to the earlier preface, in the second preface, Mme de Montbrillant emphasizes the important role that her lover M. Volx has played in her life. She has finally found happiness (“je crains que la mort ne me surprenne plus tôt qu’on ne croit et que je le voudrais, à présent que je suis heureuse”; “Je l’ai enfin trouvé, le bonheur qui jusqu’à présent m’avait fui (*sic*)! Mais qu’il m’a coûté, et quels efforts il m’a fallu faire sur moi-même pour y réussir!”); it is because, “après avoir essayé deux fois tous les malheurs attachés à une passion malheureuse,” she has at last found a man worthy of her qualities (“un cœur digne de toute la tendresse et la candeur du sien”). Their love is founded on “tendresse” but also “candeur,” which also falls into the constellation of terms associated with sincerity in the novel. Both Mme de Montbrillant and M. Volx are exemplary in their candor. They stand out in contrast from among the ranks of ordinary people, exemplified by the two disappointing loves in Mme de Montbrillant’s past that were not worthy of her.

If this second preface lacks the explicit educational impetus of the first, I would argue that it nevertheless presents the heroine as an exemplum for her readers, thereby preserving the didactic orientation of the work. As we will see, the goal of *Montbrillant*’s pedagogy is for Mme de Montbrillant’s daughter (and readers’ daughters) to marry and to find *within marriage* a relationship modeled on that of Mme de Montbrillant and M. Volx in terms of its emotional qualities, as well as financial security. *Montbrillant* is a guide to making oneself into someone who, like Mme de Montbrillant, is worthy of finding such a relationship.<sup>104</sup> In both prefaces, we can see sincerity and its related characteristics emerge as important and desired qualities; the heroine, her tutor, and her lover must all three be paragons of these values.

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<sup>104</sup> One of *Montbrillant*’s editors, Georges Roth, states that this second preface could apply equally well to the whole work or just the final two-thirds (1:6). I argue that it must apply to the whole work, because the whole work leads up to finding and establishing this idealized relationship.



At first glance, the second preface may seem to end on a note of feminine modesty, explaining that Mme de Montbrillant finds that her own day-to-day life is not worth shedding light on (“Il n’y aurait qu’à y mettre un jour de la musique, un autre des visites; le lendemain, lecture ou écriture. Cette vie ne vaut pas, en vérité, la peine d’être éclairée...”). A second reading, however, suggests that Mme de Montbrillant is simply saying to her tutor that now, not long before her death, is the right moment to hand over the letters that contain her life, because how she is going to spend her remaining days is relatively unremarkable.

Though it is clear that the prefaces offer at least two readings, *Montbrillant* criticism historically has favored only the autobiographical approach to the text, which can be explained by the work’s publication history reinforcing the seemingly autobiographical elements from the first and second prefaces. We should consider, however, that whereas d’Épinay discarded these prefaces, the novel’s first letter should most likely be considered *Montbrillant*’s true preface, the one d’Épinay was happy with and wanted to keep in the text.<sup>105</sup> This letter was written later than the novel’s second letter, but was inserted before it in the text.<sup>106</sup> D’Épinay did not discard it in any of the drafts. It reveals a distinctly educational motive, but contains no references to autobiography, retelling the events of Mme de Montbrillant’s life, or justifying Mme de Montbrillant’s actions.

In this first letter, Émilie’s great-aunt the Marquise de Beaufort calls upon M. de Lisieux to assume the role of Émilie’s tutor and surrogate father (“servez-lui de père,” she says) because her father has just died, without any male heir, and their noble name will die out. Beaufort urges Lisieux to undertake Émilie’s education, and states that they must study young Émilie’s character closely in order to make the most of it (“Il faut étudier et suivre cette enfant sans

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<sup>105</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:9-11.

<sup>106</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:9n1.

relâche”; “Tout de ma petite nièce va me devenir précieux et intéressant. Je veux recueillir exactement tout ce qu’elle dira, tout ce qu’elle fera; à son âge les détails les plus minutieux indiquent souvent le caractère et ce qu’on a à en attendre”). In this regard, the letter returns to the intention, expressed in the novel’s first discarded preface, to show mothers the necessity of studying a child’s character in order to formulate a systematic plan for an education suited to their temperament (1:4).

Mme de Beaufort asks M. de Lisieux to help specifically because Émilie’s mother has not undertaken the proper efforts to secure for her daughter the protection of the powerful, and further she is not raising Émilie to have the right conception of herself as a noble person (“Il faut lui inspirer des sentiments dignes de sa naissance; la douceur et la faiblesse du caractère de sa mère ne lui feront que trop rabattre de nos avis”). The explicit goal of Émilie’s education, according to Mme de Beaufort, should be to marry Émilie to a nobleman who will take on her arms and her name and to make Émilie a “grand sujet,” thereby increasing the glory of the family and allowing its name to continue to exist. Such aims will only be achieved by a comprehensive transformation of the young girl, who, although born with the right dispositions, has many strikes against her owing to her mother’s character and choices.

This letter signals that *Montbrillant* will be the story of Émilie’s becoming a person able to make such an advantageous marriage and become a “grand sujet,” in spite of her initial disadvantages. As we will see, however, in Émilie’s case, her education is in many senses a failure, and she does not marry a nobleman. The project then becomes displaced onto Émilie’s daughter Pauline: drawing on the knowledge of her failures, Émilie undertakes to educate Pauline differently, through cultivation of her intellect and personal qualities, especially her sincerity, in the hopes that she will marry a man who is a gentleman in every sense of the word.

Indeed, the novel ends with the mention that Pauline was able to marry a nobleman, even though she had a dowry that was negligible, suggesting that Pauline's qualities, cultivated through her education, allowed her to succeed in this enterprise.

In this first letter, we also see the menace of the convent, which is constantly looming in the background for nearly all of *Montbrillant*'s female characters. Here, Mme de Beaufort's power to act on her great-niece's behalf is greatly limited by the fact that she is in a convent; she thus needs M. de Lisieux's help all the more desperately: "Que pourrais-je sans vous? Reléguée dans un couvent par ma mauvaise fortune, irai-je trainer mon nom à la Cour et décliner les torts de ceux qui y brillent à mes dépens?" she asks.

Besides the discarded prefaces, among *Montbrillant*'s paratextual materials, there is additionally a *notice signalétique* about the characters that were meant to populate d'Épinay's original Mme de Rambures project,<sup>107</sup> which turned into *Montbrillant* and like *Montbrillant*, was to have been an epistolary work. Many of the same themes recur here as in the two discarded prefaces. Like Mme de Montbrillant, Mme de Rambure is a woman of extreme sensitivity and exemplary character, especially when it comes to *fermeté*, forms of which word d'Épinay repeats in describing her: "Mme de Rambure est d'un caractère ferme et haut; elle est d'une sensibilité extrême, avec un courage et une fermeté rares." Unlike her successor, Mme de Rambure keeps her feelings to herself, and is not as open and candid. She did not love her husband, as will be the case for Mme de Montbrillant after her marriage sours. Mme de Rambure does not have a brilliant mind ("elle est d'un sens droit; n'a point l'esprit orné; s'entend aux affaires; elle a l'esprit plus solide que brillant"), but understands financial and legal business, as Émilie will come to do as well, a good model for the average woman who has not benefitted from a superior

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<sup>107</sup> See *Montbrillant* 1:576. On the two spellings (Rambures vs. Rambure), see *Montbrillant* 1:576-577.

education. Like Émilie's mother, Mme de Rambure is widowed and has lost a huge amount of money at her husband's death, but she will be able to double her fortune through her acumen ("Elle perd la moitié de sa fortune par la mort de son mari; elle la doublera ensuite par son habileté"), and some letters were to show her business dealings: "Elle a des correspondances, tant pour les affaires que par des liaisons d'amitié, avec plusieurs personnes que nous nommerons et qualifierons en temps et lieu" (1:576). We find an echo of this line in *Montbrillant's* first preface, where Lisieux explains that he will present letters by Mme de Montbrillant and also "des différentes personnes qui se sont trouvées en correspondance avec elle, soit pour raison d'affaires, soit pour liaisons d'amitié" (1:5).

The other main characters were to include Mme de Rambure's three teenaged daughters, all with contrasting personality characteristics, and, eventually, their three husbands. Mme de Rambure also had a son, but d'Épinay planned to kill him off in short order, at age 18.<sup>108</sup> The other characters were Mme de Rambure's lover,<sup>109</sup> and two educators, a *gouverneur*, M. Le Gendre,<sup>110</sup> and a *gouvernante*, Mlle Dupont. This cast of characters suggests that the daughters' education and their marriages would have perhaps been major thematic elements of *Mme de Rambures*. Perhaps, because of their contrasting characters, their marriages would have had dissimilar results. M. Le Gendre (literally, "Mister the Son-in-Law") is an interesting choice of name for the *gouverneur*, especially if I am correct in surmising that the daughter's marriages would have been a major theme. We find an echo of governess Mlle Dupont's name in the likewise generically-named Mlle Durand, Pauline's governess in *Montbrillant*. Editor Georges

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<sup>108</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:577.

<sup>109</sup> She is a widow, and Roth asserts that this relationship would have been possibly platonic in any case, because "Mme de R. garde des 'mœurs sèveres'" (*Montbrillant*, 1:576).

<sup>110</sup> M. Le Gendre is an interesting choice of name, especially if I am correct in surmising that the daughter's marriages would have been a major thematic element.

Roth finds that the *Mme de Rambures* project was explicitly intended to be a novel: “l’auteur n’avait d’autre dessein que d’écrire un roman” (*Montbrillant*, 1:576). Roth also argues that *Mme de Rambures* appears to have been intended as an educational manual for girls to learn how to manage their money:

Il semble enfin que, sous cette forme première, l’ouvrage ait été conçu comme une sorte de traité pédagogique relatif à l’éducation des filles, et comme un manuel d’économie domestique à leur usage. Qu’aurait été, en effet, cette correspondance “pour les affaires,” cet art de “doubler sa fortune par son habileté,” sinon un petit guide de gestion financière? Le tout devant, bien entendu, se trouver enrobé dans quelque intrigue sentimentale et des “liaisons d’amitié” (*Montbrillant*, 1:576).

He goes on to comment, “*L’Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant* garde trace de ces intentions” (*Montbrillant* 1:576). While Roth is onto something, *Montbrillant* retains much more than a trace of these pedagogical intentions; in fact, they are central to the work’s entire construction.

Although we can see an educational motive in this series of paratextual materials, *Montbrillant* criticism has historically favored only a justificatory interpretation of the work. Not only does this way of reading leave aside the educational motive, it also leads to the classification of *Montbrillant* as a type of early autobiography. However, if we try to use the motives expressed in the paratext and *Montbrillant*’s first letter to assign *Montbrillant* neatly to a genre category, we run into trouble immediately, because besides tying together several thematic elements, *Montbrillant*’s structure also unites different types of writing.

## Chapter Two: The Many Genres of *Montbrillant*

Long characterized almost exclusively as an autobiography, or rather as a proto-autobiography because the genre was in a formative stage at the time, or as a *roman-à-clefs*, *Montbrillant* actually displays the formal and semantic qualities associated with a variety of different genres, including epistolary novel, journal, a form of autofiction, dialogue, *conte*, and educational novel. And, *Montbrillant* is rightfully called a *roman-à-clefs*, but in a much different sense than it has traditionally been considered.

Critic Colette Cazenobe describes *Montbrillant*'s formal complexity thus: "C'est un roman qui ne se règle pas sur un modèle romanesque unique. Il combine des formes pré-existantes et en invente d'autres," and names several genres – "un roman d'analyse psychologique," "[des] documents juridiques et financiers," "un roman-commentaire," "un roman par lettres," and finally, "une forme inédite du roman-journal intime" – that one encounters in d'Épinay's novel.<sup>1</sup> Cazenobe stresses the originality of d'Épinay's creation: "Par rapport à ses devanciers, il est neuf; il apporte du nouveau sur le plan formel. Ce serait, donc, déjà du 'nouveau roman,' si l'on pouvait s'assurer que l'apparent désordre qui résulte de cet effort de création en plusieurs sens, n'est pas l'effet du hasard, qu'il est le produit d'une entreprise délibérée [...]." Certain critics find that, indeed, *Montbrillant*'s various genres do not result in a unified message or work of art,<sup>2</sup> but Cazenobe concludes that trying to develop new forms of the epistolary novel was *Montbrillant*'s very *raison d'être*, and that Diderot and Grimm were also involved, as all three authors were interested in building on the work of Richardson

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<sup>1</sup> Cazenobe, "L'*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*: un laboratoire de formes romanesques," 229-245; 231.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Grangé, *La Destruction des genres*.

and others.<sup>3</sup> Cazenobe sees this motive as tying all of *Montbrillant*'s different formal strands together. I think hers is a compelling argument, and what I am about to say in no way nullifies her thesis, because both arguments complement each other.

There is one genre Cazenobe does not mention, a genre that, moreover, Grimm was very interested in developing in the 1750s, and that is educational novel, or *roman pédagogique*. In the July 1, 1762 issue of the *Correspondance littéraire*, there appeared a critique, by Grimm, of Rousseau's *Émile*. One of Grimm's principal objections to *Émile* is that it is too overtly preachy, and he thinks that while Rousseau still should have depicted his chosen pupil Émile's learning process in order to express his views on *l'éducation particulière* – education with a private tutor, rather than in a school – he would have done better to disguise his precepts: “il ne fallait point qu'il fît un ouvrage didactique rempli de règles, de principes, de maximes; il fallait en faire un ouvrage purement historique; c'est-à-dire qu'après avoir bien établi le caractère de son élève, il fallait nous faire l'histoire ou le roman de son éducation [...]”<sup>4</sup> Grimm objects to *Émile* because it is too much like a treatise and too little like a novel: *Émile* is “un ouvrage mixte, tantôt historique, tantôt didactique” (112). Any author wishing to write an ideal educational work should not give any of his methods as a principle or rule to follow, because the application of the rules will be different for each student. “[... C]e qui convient merveilleusement à un tel sujet ferait un très-mauvais effet sur un tel autre ; ainsi il n'y a point de méthode à prescrire dans l'éducation particulière, qui varie autant qu'il y a d'élèves [...]” (111) writes Grimm, echoing John Locke's disclaimer in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, published in French in 1695, that “[...] the Method here propos'd has had no ordinary Effects upon a Gentleman's Son,

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<sup>3</sup> See especially 231, 242-245.

<sup>4</sup> Grimm, et al., *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*. Ed. Maurice Tourneux. Vol. 2-3, 5. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1878; 111.

it was not designed for.”<sup>5</sup> For Grimm, there is a philosophical reason for choosing the novel form: if each child must receive an individualized education best suited to their temperament, and there are therefore as many different educational trajectories as there are children, the novel form better allows the author to show how an education worked in a particular case: “[...] il n’y a point de réplique contre les faits narrés historiquement sans préceptes et sans pédanterie, pourvu que vous avez donné à votre élève et la méthode que vous avez suivie dans son éducation, et qu’on voie clairement que votre méthode a produit les effets que vous lui attribuez.” Grimm repeatedly underscores that the authors of such treatises must take pains to write a novel in which maxims and precepts are everywhere present but seamlessly woven into the narration and completely hidden. The more detail an author can provide about his characters, the better: “[...] la condition et le caractère des personnages doivent être établis dans ces traités avec autant de soin que dans un roman; sans quoi, point de vérité et point d’instruction, qui devient inutile et nulle à mesure qu’elle devient vague” (112). Clichés have nothing to teach, says Grimm; rather, “c’est l’exemple et l’histoire” (112). If *lieux communs* and maxims were all that were needed, we would be the sagest men on the earth, because all our lives, we hear nothing but these – in sermons, in plays, in schools, and at home. In spite of this, Grimm says, the human condition is little improved.

Grimm even describes just such a novel that he had planned to write in the past, the story of a single father educating his son: “L’histoire de ce fils, jusqu’à l’âge de dix-huit ans, c’est mon *Traité d’éducation*, que je me serais bien gardé de nommer ainsi et à qui je n’en aurais pas non plus donné la livrée, en le farcissant de principes et de méthodes [...]” (112). Grimm would not have had his characters serve as models for his readers, either: “au contraire, j’aurais mis tous

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<sup>5</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 80.



mes efforts à cacher le but de mon ouvrage sous la simplicité de la narration historique” (112). Grimm believes that the work he had projected to write would have been more effective, and moreover, “il avait plus l’air d’un ouvrage de génie” than *Émile* and it would have lacked Rousseau’s pedantic tone (112). Grimm also mentions that Rousseau had been aware of his own educational ideas and purposefully contradicted all but one of them in *Émile*, but that Grimm remained unconvinced of Rousseau’s arguments.<sup>6</sup>

When scholars consider d’Épinay’s educational ideas, they usually focus on her *Conversations d’Émilie*, or, sometimes, on the *Lettres à mon fils*,<sup>7</sup> but *Montbrillant* fits Grimm’s description of the ideal educational work in novel form to a tee. We can think of *Montbrillant*, the story of a mother who teaches her daughter (and, eventually, son) as the counterpart to Grimm’s novel about a father educating his son. Like Grimm’s story, d’Épinay’s novel is another one of the infinite number of possible education programs, each of which correspond exactly to the needs of an individual child.

In *Le Roman pédagogique de Fénelon à Rousseau*,<sup>8</sup> his monumental study of the genre, Robert Grandroute mentions that defining the seventeenth-and eighteenth-century *roman pédagogique* can be difficult because the genre of *roman* itself was not yet established: “Ses frontières sont floues et il arrive qu’on le distingue mal soit du traité, soit de ces formes narratives voisines – apologue, anecdote, nouvelle, histoire, conte... – que les âges ultérieurs ont essayé de différencier, mais qui, au XVIIIème siècle, ne sont souvent que les vêtements divers

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<sup>6</sup> The idea that Rousseau borrowed is that one should not teach a child their catechism by rote at a young age, but rather one must wait until the child can understand what they are saying. Grimm and d’Épinay’s ideas on catechism possibly marked Rousseau’s thought expressed in the *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*.

<sup>7</sup> Weinreb, for example, does not group *Montbrillant* together with d’Épinay’s educational texts in describing the organization of her book, *Eagle in a Gauze Cage*. See *Eagle*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> I refer interested readers to this work for an exhaustive examination of the *roman pédagogique* among d’Épinay’s predecessors and at the time she was writing.

qu'a pu revêtir le roman" (3). It can therefore be difficult to categorize works as *romans pédagogiques*. For Granderoute, the criterion that places novels in this category is that a *maître* and a *disciple* are central characters, "les deux personnages mêmes de la narration" (3). Perhaps the most well known example – and the touchstone – for the genre is Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque*, in which the teacher is Mentor, or Minerva in disguise, and the student is young Telemachus who embarks on a quest to find his father. Granderoute explains that in other didactic literature, the author often fills the role of teacher and the reader that of student; the *roman pédagogique* "transposes" this relationship "au sein de l'œuvre, dans la trame de la fiction" (3). Thus, in *Télémaque*, Mentor represents the "romancier-précepteur" and Télémaque the "élève-lecteur" (3). There can be several teachers in a series. *Montbrillant* fits this description, as Émilie's relationships with her various teachers and guides are central to the plot, as is her role as educator and her relationship with her children, who are her students. D'Épinay refers to *Télémaque* and endorses its philosophy in her *Lettres à mon fils*, written in the same period as *Montbrillant*, so we know that she was thinking of Fénelon. Granderoute explains that sometimes the guide/mentor cannot be present, and sometimes is replaced by "l'apprentissage direct par la vie et le monde" or by other guides, sometimes even "anti-maîtres" (4). *Montbrillant* exhibits these features, too. The novel presents several teachers in succession so that readers can compare their methods and effectiveness. Regardless of what ultimately happens to the teachers, Granderoute says, "on assiste bien au mouvement d'un être qui s'éveille, se forme ou se transforme et qui finit par acquérir une certaine 'philosophie' face aux problèmes que posent l'existence et la société" (4). This definition perfectly describes what happens to Émilie over the course of d'Épinay's novel. For Granderoute, it is tempting to apply the term *Bildungsroman* to

such works.<sup>9</sup> He acknowledges that *romans pédagogiques* are, effectively, *romans de formation*.<sup>10</sup> However, Grandroute distinguishes between *Bildungsromans*, in which a certain pedagogical philosophy becomes apparent to the reader as a result of the young person's formation, and *romans pédagogiques*, in which a specific type of pedagogy determines the outcome of a young person's formation. In *Montbrillant*, the type of pedagogy to which each child is exposed determines their character and intellect. According to Grandroute, authors of *romans pédagogiques* attempt, with greater or lesser success, to individualize the traits of their characters, but he says, these characters "tendent souvent à prendre une valeur de symbole" (4).

To what extent are d'Épinay's characters individualized and to what extent are they allegorical? At first glance, we may think that they are highly individualized, because many of them are based on people d'Épinay knew. From an economic, familial, romantic, and legal perspective, the situations of d'Épinay and of Émilie have many points of similarity. Like Émilie, d'Épinay married a *fermier général* who mistreated her and their family and infected her with syphilis.<sup>11</sup> M. d'Épinay spent money recklessly, especially through his womanizing, jeopardizing his children's futures. D'Épinay had two children who survived infancy and whom she acknowledged,<sup>12</sup> and *Montbrillant*'s Émilie has two children. In 1749, d'Épinay succeeded in obtaining a *séparation de biens*, or separation of assets, like Émilie does in the book. D'Épinay also received an annuity from her father-in-law, although like Émilie, she still struggled

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<sup>9</sup> The term *Bildungsroman* was not coined until after *Montbrillant* was written, but the term is helpful in describing *Montbrillant*. On its usage, see *Summerfield and Downward, New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman*; Engel, "Variants of the Romantic 'Bildungsroman' (with a Short Note on the 'Artist Novel')," 263-295.

<sup>10</sup> Other terms we might aptly apply to *Montbrillant* include *roman d'idées*, because of its comparison of different educational positions, and *roman d'apprentissage*, because of its heroine's growth over time.

<sup>11</sup> Weinreb 1; 14; 16.

<sup>12</sup> Weinreb 1; 15-17.

financially for the rest of her life.<sup>13</sup> We can identify parallels to Émilie's relationships with her lovers Formeuse and Volx in d'Épinay's relationships with the gentleman Claude-Louis Dupin de Francueil and Grimm.<sup>14</sup> Many of d'Épinay's real-life friendships also find their counterparts in *Montbrillant*, such as Émilie's friendship with René, the character who has much in common with Rousseau. Like Émilie's husband, M. d'Épinay lost his post as *fermier général* because of his negligence.<sup>15</sup> Because of her husband's financial situation, d'Épinay, like Émilie, had to move into a more modest property.<sup>16</sup> Like Émilie, d'Épinay suffered from a painful chronic illness and was treated by Tronchin in Geneva.<sup>17</sup>

Because of these similarities to the author's own life, an autobiographical reading of *Montbrillant* would seem to make sense. In many respects, the work's protagonist Émilie could almost be a double for d'Épinay, and has indeed been considered as such, by scholars like Elisabeth Badinter, who treats *Montbrillant* as a historical record of d'Épinay's life.<sup>18</sup> Both Badinter and Georges Roth, editor of the first complete published edition of *Montbrillant*, treat the work as a roman-à-clefs, in other words, a mostly true work about real individuals who actually lived, which is only considered a work of fiction because these people have been transformed into thinly-veiled characters, each one given a new name to mask his or her true identity. In Roth's edition, readers find a key listing the presumed real identities of d'Épinay's characters, for example, René equals Rousseau, Garnier equals Diderot, and Volx equals

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<sup>13</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 1; 18.

<sup>15</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Badinter, *Ambition*.

Grimm.<sup>19</sup> D'Épinay herself seems to encourage an autobiographical reading of *Montbrillant* since the text includes passages from *Mes Moments heureux*, including from *Mon portrait*, an explicitly autobiographical work.<sup>20</sup> And some scholars, like Roth, have noted that *Montbrillant* also contains some of d'Épinay's real letters, or letters that closely resemble her real letters.<sup>21</sup>

However, thinking of the work simply as autobiographical sets up certain expectations on the part of the reader, principally that d'Épinay will relay the important, formative events of her life, and that we can generally trust d'Épinay to provide a historically accurate version of events.<sup>22</sup> According to this measure, *Montbrillant* fails on many fronts.<sup>23</sup> In fact, d'Épinay does not always include everything we might expect from her own life, and in spite of the recognizable elements from her life within its pages, *Montbrillant* does not completely match the historical record. Sometimes d'Épinay conflates two or more people who play a similar role or who have similar characteristics into one character.<sup>24</sup> A notable example is that she only mentions the protagonist having one daughter, whereas d'Épinay herself had two; her daughter Suzanne-Thérèse died in infancy.<sup>25</sup> And, scholars had to search long and hard to come up with a possible – though unconfirmed and now largely discredited – identity for one of the most

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<sup>19</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:577-580. Note that d'Épinay supplied a list of the characters that were meant to populate *Montbrillant* and A.-A. Barbier identified the real-life individuals on whom they were based. Roth's wording makes it sound as though d'Épinay intended to write a roman-à-clefs, since Barbier "avait eu entre les mains le manuscrit définitif de l'ouvrage" when he was identifying them.

<sup>20</sup> It is important to note, however, that d'Épinay does not frame the *Mon Portrait* passages in *Montbrillant* in an autobiographical way like in *Mes Moments heureux*. For example, d'Épinay has the character of René, inspired by Rousseau, speak a passage taken from *Mon Portrait*. See *Montbrillant*, 2:424.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, *Montbrillant*, 1:308-312, originally dated 1747 and published in 1758 in *Moments* as the "Lettre à Mme la présidente de M\*\*\*."

<sup>22</sup> See Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.

<sup>23</sup> David offers a detailed analysis of how *Montbrillant* fails the "pacte autobiographique" test (*Autobiographie* 163-173).

<sup>24</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:577.

<sup>25</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:443n2.

important characters in the work, that of Émilie's tutor, M. de Lisieux, who, one of *Montbrillant's* editors concludes, "n'est qu'une fiction commode, créée pour les nécessités du récit, dont il réunit les fils et les documents entre ses mains."<sup>26</sup> Yet another obstacle to an autobiographical reading is the fact that the heroine herself dies at a moment that corresponds not to the death of d'Épinay, but of her mother.<sup>27</sup> Thus I argue that it is more accurate and more productive to imagine *Montbrillant* as a work that, while it may be informed in part by some of the events of d'Épinay's own life, is an educational work written in the form of a fictive epistolary novel.

Because it has often been described as a *roman à clef*,<sup>28</sup> for approximately 200 years, critics have scoured *Montbrillant's* pages, the better to compare d'Épinay's characters to their real-life counterparts. Because M. René, for example, is a caricature of Rousseau,<sup>29</sup> scholars have painstakingly compared d'Épinay's portrayal to Rousseau's letters and *Confessions* in a quest to gauge the truthfulness of each author's respective account of events.<sup>30</sup> But when *Montbrillant* is read as a *roman pédagogique*, our interest in the *clefs* changes: we want to know which educational positions are embodied in which characters. Now René is interesting not so much for what he can tell us about the real-life relationship between Rousseau and d'Épinay as for his staunch opposition to the notions that parents are well suited to teach their own children and that children can learn.<sup>31</sup> When we read the *clefs* as educational positions, we find that d'Épinay

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<sup>26</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:9n2. See also 1:54n3.

<sup>27</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:xi.

<sup>29</sup> See Tyl, "L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant des Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay aux Contre-Confessions," 78.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Buffenoir, *La Comtesse d'Houdetot, une amie de J.-J. Rousseau*. Guillemin, "Les Affaires de l'Ermitage." For extended commentary on these and other examples, see David, *L'Autobiographie de convenance*, 49-157.

<sup>31</sup> See *Montbrillant* 3:135-137.

refers not only to her contemporaries but to other personages as well, such as Madame de Sévigné.

D'Épinay succeeded well in attaining the ideal of an educational novel – as opposed to a treatise – set forth by Grimm, so well in fact that her educational aims have been overlooked. Readers do, however, occasionally encounter parts of *Montbrillant* that are treatise-like. For example, readers will find embedded in the novel portions of other educational works d'Épinay was writing in 1756 around the time she began *Montbrillant*, including the *Lettres à mon fils* – the first two letters find their way into the novel<sup>32</sup> – and the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*.<sup>33</sup> The few treatise-like portions could be likened to works such as Fénelon's educational treatise for girls or Mme de Maintenon's rules for the girls at Saint-Cyr, reconstructed from her letters to her former pupils and from their remembrances.<sup>34</sup>

Seen as a fictional work, it makes sense to describe *Montbrillant* as an epistolary novel, which follows several of the genre's conventions, including insistence on the authenticity of the letters contained within its pages in the prefaces (and later on where Lisieux says, “Je les prie [les critiques] de se rappeler sans cesse que ce n'est pas un roman que je donne au public, mais les mémoires très véritables d'une famille et de plusieurs sociétés d'hommes et de femmes soumis aux faiblesses de l'humanité”). What could be more novelistic than finding some “real letters” in an attic or garret, or being given them, as Lisieux claims happened to him?<sup>35</sup>

*Montbrillant* also follows conventions of letter writing, such as the use of *formules de politesse*.

The novel contains a host of many characters who write to each other in a rich polyphony of

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<sup>32</sup> See *Montbrillant* 2:518-528.

<sup>33</sup> See *Montbrillant* 3:31-36.

<sup>34</sup> Fénelon, *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (1687). See also: Mme de Maintenon. *Lettres historiques et édifiantes adressées aux dames de Saint-Louis*.

<sup>35</sup> For more on this idea, see Tyl, 70.

voices,<sup>36</sup> which Sainte-Beuve likened to Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.<sup>37</sup> D'Épinay masters the art of writing in several unique voices and registers; each character has his or her own style, as though d'Épinay were many authors, for she is not only skilled in ventriloquizing her contemporaries, on whom she based many characters, but also in creating the individual voices of characters who are likely completely original, not based on any model, like M. de Lisieux. Pierre Tyl refers to some of d'Épinay's portraits of her contemporaries as "caricatur[es]."<sup>38</sup> Some sections of *Montbrillant* are even akin to *pastiche*: editor Georges Roth, for example, highlights the occasional passage that is "like Diderot" or "like Duclos."<sup>39</sup> D'Épinay's ventriloquism has a twist, however, as she uses it not to recount actual events faithfully, but to make the points she wants to convey. D'Épinay also switches between multiple registers with ease, as Cécile Cavillac observes.<sup>40</sup> Cavillac argues that not many eighteenth-century works were able to so intimately and successfully link sensitivity and irony.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, sometimes the humor comes from the heroine's extreme sensitivity.<sup>42</sup>

Although d'Épinay pokes gentle fun at Émilie's sensibility, ultimately the cultivation of fine feelings is valued in *Montbrillant*, and the plot is emotion-driven as well as event-driven. We know that d'Épinay corresponded with Samuel Richardson, author of such epistolary

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<sup>36</sup> For more on d'Épinay's polyphony, see Weinreb, *Eagle*, 10-11; 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> See Tyl, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Tyl, "L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant," 78.

<sup>39</sup> Roth compares the conversation on *pudeur* in the episode on Mme Médéric's dinner to Rousseau's *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, d'Holbach's *Système de la Nature*, and Diderot's *Lettres à Sophie Volland* and, repeatedly, to his *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, in addition to an anecdote about Duclos, although Roth states that Pierre-Maurice Masson was mistaken to think that Diderot "a fortement arrangé" d'Épinay's passage. (See *Montbrillant*, 2:92-99.)

<sup>40</sup> Cavillac, "Audaces et inhibitions d'une romancière au XVIIIe siècle," 896.

<sup>41</sup> Cavillac, "Ironie et sensibilité dans l'*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*," 103.

<sup>42</sup> Cavillac, "Ironie et sensibilité," 112. See Cavillac's analysis of Émilie's despair during the preparations for her lover's trip to Normandie with her rival and the umbrella episode for an illustration of how this mechanism functions, relying on *dédoublement* (113).



sentimental novels as *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. D'Épinay even considered giving him the manuscript of *Montbrillant* in 1760.<sup>43</sup> Mary Trouille has argued that d'Épinay's novel is a response to, and indeed, an attempt to top, another sentimental novel, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*.<sup>44</sup> Several critics have seen the work of Jane Austen as a critique of the sentimental novel, and Jérémie Grangé argues that like Austen, d'Épinay's chosen form in *Montbrillant* inherently critiques the sentimental novel, because its author finds the form insufficient to her reality and needs therefore to explode it.<sup>45</sup>

I agree that *Montbrillant* contains some critique of the sentimental novel form, but here I wish to come back to what Cécile Cavaillac said about humor in d'Épinay's novel. Cavaillac stresses that d'Épinay is capable of linking sensibility and irony with an extreme degree of nuance and skill. I think one of d'Épinay's biggest critiques of the sentimental novel comes through in her use of humor. *Montbrillant* presents many types of humor, from Émilie's self-deferentially funny passages that elicit a gentle, sympathetic chuckle from the reader, such as the one analyzed by Cavaillac in which Émilie misses her lover because she did not have an umbrella and thereafter sets up two umbrellas "in perpetuity" in her entryway, to the caustically sardonic passages that make the reader righteously angry, such as the novel's closing remark, made after Émilie's agonizing death brought about in part by her abusive husband, that he, "quoiqu'il n'ait que quarante-cinq ans, il est rongé de goutte et de gravelle et de tous les maux qu'il s'est attirés ; mais il y a lieu de croire qu'il a encore longtemps à traîner son inutile vie"

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<sup>43</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the characteristics of sentimental novels, see Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760-1820*. See also: Maxwell and Trumpener, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*.

<sup>45</sup> See Grangé, *La Destruction des genres: Jane Austen et Madame d'Épinay*, especially the Première Partie, "Au-delà des genres: Jane Austen, Madame d'Épinay et la critique du roman sentimental."

(3:560). In the end, I find that it is the suppleness of d'Épinay's humor that allows her to poke fun at the sentimental novel while still encouraging her readers to embrace their sensibility as a desired, valued quality. Moderation is important to d'Épinay in this regard. *Montbrillant* is, after all, no *Werther*. At one point, having been abandoned by her lover Formeuse, Émilie is plunged into a deep depression and thinks of suicide, an episode the novel treats seriously. But Émilie ultimately does not kill herself and over time develops *fermeté* and learns to live as a sensitive person in the society that nearly crushed her, through self-cultivation and by surrounding herself with honest people. Of course, her health has been destroyed and ultimately she dies at the hands of her husband and an indifferent State, but for a time she manages to live a fulfilling life.

Another of *Montbrillant*'s genres is the fable. D'Épinay uses the term *fable* in a list of "Notes des Changements à faire dans la fable," preserved as part of one of the novel's manuscripts.<sup>46</sup> In 1762, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defined it as "[c]hose feinte & inventée pour instruire & pour divertir. *Fable morale. Fable mystérieuse. Les fables d'Ésope, de Phédre. Sous le voile des fables. La moralité des fables.*" Besides this primary definition, there are also several secondary definitions, including "FABLE se prend aussi dans le même sens pour le sujet, l'argument d'un Poëme Épique, d'un Poëme Dramatique, d'un Roman. [...]"<sup>47</sup> In this context, we could interpret d'Épinay's use of the term to refer to *Montbrillant* in either sense. However, given the novel's educational motive, it is tempting to read the entire work as an extended fable. Shorter episodes within the novel could also be considered as stand-alone fables or didactic stories.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For the full list of projected Changements, see *Montbrillant*, 3:565.

<sup>47</sup> "Fable," *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the many different types and characteristics of fables, see Pascal, *La Fable au Siècle des Lumières*. Saillard, *Essai sur la fable en France au XVIIIe siècle*. Boch, *Les Dieux désenchantés: La fable dans la pensée française de Huet à Voltaire (1680-1760)*.

Although *Montbrillant* was not published during her lifetime, had it appeared in print sooner after her death, as the author seems to have intended,<sup>49</sup> d'Épinay could have been said to provide a sort of guidebook, or “survival manual,” as Mary Trouille calls it,<sup>50</sup> for relatively elite women readers trapped in unbearably bad marriages and untenable financial situations under the *Ancien régime*. As Émilie has to learn all about the options available to her for separating from her husband, managing her money, and ensuring her own and her children's future financial security, the reader acquires legal information and business skills along with her. Many situations in *Montbrillant* revolve around money, and d'Épinay gives the reader all the financial details, including the specific amounts of money involved in each case. In one such situation, Émilie receives an offer of marriage from a nobleman. This attempted marriage fails for one reason only: because some members of Émilie's family are unable to give her anything and her uncle M. de Bernon, although he is, as another family member puts it, “riche comme un Crésus!,”<sup>51</sup> is only willing to give her 25.000 *livres* toward meeting the dowry of 100.000 *livres* requested by said gentleman (1:156). “Prenez-vous-en à votre oncle qui s'est obstiné *mordicus* à ses tristes 25.000 livres. [...] Fi! cela est indigne; et à moins que son projet ne soit de vous faire épouser son fils, je ne saurais lui pardonner de vous avoir fait manquer ce mariage,” writes Émilie's cousin Mme de Sally (1:164). M. de Bernon is one in a long line of men to fail Émilie financially, out of cluelessness, neglect, weakness, greed, or malice. D'Épinay's detailed account of this failed transaction makes clear that the true basis for marriage in Émilie's society is money.<sup>52</sup> In addition, not only does d'Épinay state, for example, that Émilie's mother has a

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<sup>49</sup> We recall that Grimm was to prepare the work for publication after her death. See *Montbrillant*, 1:ix.

<sup>50</sup> Trouille, “La Femme Mal Mariée: Mme d'Épinay's Challenge to *Julie* and *Émile*,” 48.

<sup>51</sup> 1:166.

<sup>52</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:156-157.

pension of only 2.000 livres,<sup>53</sup> but she also *shows* what that means: for instance, that Émilie must beg for an education alongside her cousin Mimi,<sup>54</sup> or that she must accept the charity of a new dress from her disdainful aunt, in spite of the humiliation it causes her,<sup>55</sup> or that she misses out on being able to marry the nobleman because she does not have enough of a dowry.<sup>56</sup> The financial information contained within the novel's pages is so frank, detailed, and specific that Weinreb and other critics liken d'Épinay to Balzac.<sup>57</sup>

Before Émilie obtains the *séparation de biens*, she must take many financial and legal considerations into account, as well as the potential damage to her reputation. After following Émilie through her consultations with her tutor, lawyer, friends, and lover, as well as her appeal to her father-in-law to obtain it, the reader finally sees reproduced nearly in its entirety the legal document detailing the separation and all of its financial provisions proposed by Émilie's lawyer.<sup>58</sup> We see the same attention to legal and fiscal detail with respect to Émilie's father-in-law, M. de Bernon's testament. Leading up to his death, all of the interested parties jockey for position to get the best share of his inheritance, a frenzied activity that culminates with the public reading of M. de Bernon's testament after his death, a scene in which Émilie carefully recounts everyone else's reactions, interspersed with passages that summarize or quote the document:

Il était neuf heures. M. de Grangé lui dit [à M. de Montbrillant] qu'on l'avait attendu pour l'ouverture du testament. On proposa de la faire après le souper ; mais M. de Montbrillant la demanda tout de suite. Nous étions tous rassemblés. M. de Riltière et le notaire furent mandés. On retarda le souper et l'on lut le testament. L'exhortation en est extrêmement touchante. Tous ses legs sont simplement et sagement motivés. Il n'a oublié aucun domestique. Le Bel a 400 livres de rente. Il laisse 30.000 livres à ma mère. Il partage tous ses enfants également. Il substitue toute la portion de M. de Montbrillant à

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<sup>53</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:5.

<sup>54</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:18.

<sup>55</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:19.

<sup>56</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:164.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Weinreb, *Eagle*, 51; Cazenobe, 240.

<sup>58</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 2:17-18.

nos enfants, nés et à naître. Il substitue jusqu'à sa légitime, à laquelle il est réduit s'il n'accepte pas la substitution en son entier. Au défaut d'enfants, les frères et sœurs sont appelés à la substitution.

M. de Montbrillant changea plusieurs fois de visage à la lecture de cet article et me regarda avec colère, à ce que me dit Mme de Ménénil, car j'étais si émue, si tremblante, que je n'avais garde de l'examiner. Mais je pensai me trouver mal à la lecture d'un autre legs auquel je ne m'attendais pas. En voici à peu près les termes:

“Voulant que Mme de Montbrillant, ma chère belle-fille, puisse jouir en entier de la rente que je lui ai faite par tendresse et par reconnaissance, je lui lègue en sus 500 livres par année par chaque enfant né et à naître, pour tenir lieu de la contribution qu'elle serait obligée de payer pour sa part de leurs frais, comme étant séparée de biens de son mari, et j'entends que la dite somme soit employée comme elle l'entendra, au profit et à l'entretien et éducation des dits enfants, personne n'étant plus en état qu'elle d'en fixer un bon usage.”

Il nomma M. de Grangé et M. de Riltière exécuteurs testamentaires. [...] (2:261)

Afterward, the characters engage in a lengthy process of systematically cataloguing and distributing M. de Bernon's property, including his cash, jewelry, artwork, and library.<sup>59</sup> We can see, thus, that another one of the genres that *Montbrillant* appropriates is that of the legal document. Besides the consultation on the *séparation de biens* and part of M. de Bernon's testament, the work also contains other portions of testaments, as well as marriage proposals and marriage contracts. These documents are seamlessly integrated into the novel, as d'Épinay shows the process leading up to obtaining them, as well as their limitations and the full range of repercussions that come from them.

The education provided by *Montbrillant* is not limited to general principles or educational theories, but is highly specific and also extremely practical, and it is explicitly aimed towards women, a group unlikely to have received instruction in fiscal or legal matters, and one moreover disadvantaged by the laws of society. Couched in the form of an epistolary novel (a form associated with women, especially young women), one that gives considerable space to questions

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<sup>59</sup> *Montbrillant*, 2:264-269.

of friendship, love, and marriage, d'Épinay's advice was, strategically, well-poised to reach the audience best situated to profit from it.

Not only does *Montbrillant* contain legal documents but also letters that can serve as models for the reader in several areas of life, from how to write to family and friends to how to engage with the intelligentsia, to how to write to lawyers and conduct business. *Montbrillant* shows how women can achieve goals like maintaining their reputations, obtaining a *séparation de biens*, and gaining the right to educate their own children. Readers watch as Émilie achieves increasingly complex legal and business objectives. For example, after successfully obtaining the separation and winning some measure of control over her children's education, Émilie is able to set things right for Mme Constant, whom M. de Montbrillant has victimized through abuse of his position as *fermier général*, while Émilie also manages to extricate her husband from the affair without compromising him, thanks to a deftly maneuvered series of letters to the right people.<sup>60</sup> Commenting on the *Mme de Rambures* proto-novel, Roth treated the sentimental parts, such as those dealing with Mme de Rambure's *amitiés*, separately from what he considered to be the business-educational parts of the work,<sup>61</sup> but there is little-to-no separation between the personal and the business aspects of the Constant situation for Émilie, and in a general sense, it is impossible to separate the business, educational, and personal aspects of Émilie's experiences. Simply consider the fact that Émilie misses out on marrying the nobleman because she is too poor. Marriage, for Émilie, is a distinctly emotional experience: she loves her husband passionately, at least initially, and she believes in true love and fidelity, but for the upper classes in her society, marriage is all about money.<sup>62</sup> Or consider the *séparation de biens*: Émilie shows

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<sup>60</sup> *Montbrillant*, 2:295-304, 314-323.

<sup>61</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:576.

<sup>62</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:156-157.

how she has to beg her husband even for a pittance while he squanders their money;<sup>63</sup> she also shows the emotional and physical toll the legal proceedings take on her.<sup>64</sup> Émilie's experiences cannot be separated from her educational plans for her children, because her own experiences provide justification for her choices, and reading about Émilie's experiences provides an education in itself for d'Épinay's readers.

In providing model letters for her readers, d'Épinay continues a French feminine tradition that looks to model letters for inspiration, a tradition in which Mme de Sévigné became the most desirable model to emulate.<sup>65</sup> Besides providing model letters for readers, d'Épinay, who was the author of plays and dialogues, also gives *Montbrillant*'s readers model conversations, including conversations that are part of legal and financial dealings, conversations that show how a mother can educate her own children, and conversations with intellectuals from whom Émilie learns much. Often, in the middle of a letter or her journal, Émilie will break into recounting a conversation.<sup>66</sup> Many times the dialogue is reported in script form, so that it is almost like a play. These passages also contribute to the work's formal hybridity, and they bring to mind *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* and other works of Diderot, with whom d'Épinay often collaborated. There is some dispute about the authorship of certain *contes* – were they written by Diderot or

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<sup>63</sup> *Montbrillant*, 2:16.

<sup>64</sup> *Montbrillant*, 2:19, for example.

<sup>65</sup> Dow, "Women Readers in Europe: Readers, Writers, Salonnières, 1750-1900," 7.

<sup>66</sup> Examples include dinner conversation at the *salonnière* Mme Médéric's home, which opens Émilie's eyes to her contemporaries' intellectual preoccupations (*Montbrillant*, 2:90-101), conversations in which Formeuse denies his infidelities (such as *Montbrillant*, 2:237-242), many conversations with Desbarres (such as *Montbrillant*, 2:122-128) and many conversations between Émilie and her husband (such as *Montbrillant*, 2:187-188).

d'Épinay? – and in 1984, Pierre Chartier even proposed that Diderot was the real author of *Montbrillant*,<sup>67</sup> a stance he has since revised.<sup>68</sup>

As we have seen, another author to whom d'Épinay is sometimes compared is Charles Pinot Duclos, who inspired one of *Montbrillant*'s characters, M. Desbarres. Duclos' *Confessions du comte de \*\*\**, published in 1741, presents readers with a series of portraits of different personalities, and his contemporaries enjoyed matching up the characters with their real-life counterparts. Although d'Épinay's characters embodied different educational positions and served to advance her educational arguments, d'Épinay was nonetheless a skilled portrait-painter, too, who presents us with a gallery of different three-dimensional personalities and types. D'Épinay's Émilie bears some resemblance to Duclos' heroine Mme de Selve, who represents true love, virtue, and sensibility. As Grimm recommends in his manifesto on the ideal form of an educational work, *Montbrillant* teaches by example, and d'Épinay's array of portraits provide the reader with many characters, moral positions, actions, educational positions, and ways of being to judge and compare.

In addition to letters, conversations, and portraits, *Montbrillant* also includes Émilie's journal. M. de Lisieux urges Émilie to write a journal so that she can trace the vicissitudes of her own feelings over time and to send it to him periodically,<sup>69</sup> a task which Émilie takes up with enthusiasm. Long portions of the work comprise the journal, and thus we can say that journal is another one of *Montbrillant*'s genres. Like letters, diaries are traditionally considered a “women's genre.” D'Épinay uses these women's genres to argue for women's education, and the

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<sup>67</sup> See Chartier, “Corps oublié ou la Métamorphose du nageur – De l'*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant aux Eléments de Physiologie*.” See especially 213-214. For commentary, see David, *L'Autobiographie de convenance*, 149-150.

<sup>68</sup> Conversations with Pierre Chartier, October 2012 and June 2013.

<sup>69</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:334-335.



evidence suggests she intended to use these genres to address women readers strategically. In the case of the journal specifically, I believe d'Épinay was using the form to show women readers a model for how to develop their subjectivity as modern individuals. Indeed, because of the high degree of insight into the heroine's interiority d'Épinay provides, *Montbrillant* has been called a *roman psychologique*,<sup>70</sup> in the tradition of La Fayette.

### D'Épinay, Sévigné, and Proust

D'Épinay seems to have been inspired by Sévigné, both in terms of her epistolary style and form, and in terms of the content of the educational program Sévigné proposed for her granddaughter. Sévigné was a model that would have likewise been important to d'Épinay's readers. For the uninitiated who have not read any of *Montbrillant*, thinking of Sévigné (and Diderot and Duclos) may be helpful to understand what the work is like, but they are not the only authors who come to mind when we think of *Montbrillant*'s formal characteristics. There is also Proust.

There is a well-known link between Sévigné and Proust.<sup>71</sup> D'Épinay also shares a strong link to Sévigné, and I believe that d'Épinay consciously cultivated the similarities. I would go so far as to argue that Sévigné, d'Épinay, and Proust should all be considered part of the same tradition. Modern editions of Sévigné's, d'Épinay's, and Proust's works all run to three volumes. Proust and d'Épinay both feature a dizzying menagerie of characters and a great deal of

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<sup>70</sup> See the Cazenobe article cited above for more discussion of the journal as it relates to this dimension.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example: Labat, "Proust's Mme de Sévigné." Wieser, "Proust et Mme de Sévigné." Sommella, "Le 'Mythe' Sévigné dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust." Duchêne, "Madame de Sévigné, personnage du roman dans l'œuvre de Proust." Arey, "Un Phénomène de dépendance: L'Amour-maladie chez Sévigné et Proust." Goldsmith, "Proust on Madame de Sévigné's Letters: Some Aspects of Epistolary Writing." See also Chapter 5, "Mothers and Daughters: The Origins of Gomorrah" in Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism*.

complexity (an understatement), as does Sévigné's writing, although, unlike theirs, hers was not fictional. Like *À La Recherche du temps perdu*, d'Épinay's novel demonstrates a broad preoccupation with class and the different strata of society. Her mastery of the art of *pastiche* also recalls that of Proust.<sup>72</sup> In *À La Recherche du temps perdu* there is a character called Mme d'Épinay (la princesse d'Épinay).<sup>73</sup> Open up *Montbrillant* to the very first line of the very first of Émilie's innumerable journal entries and you will read: "Je me suis levée de bonne heure [...]" (1:337). Proust's *Recherche* famously begins, "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure,"<sup>74</sup> perhaps a coincidence, perhaps a curious inversion of d'Épinay's words. Both authors use the line to introduce an episode of in which their protagonists attempt to gain a private audience with an object of desire who is occupied with social obligations to others.

We find another parallel between d'Épinay and Proust when we turn to the thorny question of their main characters' identity. In Proust studies, it is nearly universally accepted that although the *Recherche* contains material inspired by the author's personal experiences, we must refer to the narrator as "Marcel" rather than Proust; Marcel is considered to be a character distinct from the real-life author. In d'Épinay's case, however, many scholars have unquestioningly adopted the equation Émilie de Montbrillant equals Louise d'Épinay, although unlike Proust, d'Épinay does not share her protagonist's given name, nor is *Montbrillant* told completely from first-person point of view. Contrary to this way of reading, I argue that the way we treat the narrator Marcel would be a good model for how to think of Émilie de Montbrillant. Indeed, in a 1770 letter to the Abbé Galiani, d'Épinay devotes several lines to a problem she anticipates people will have with *Montbrillant*, namely that people will think poorly of her,

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<sup>72</sup> See also Weinreb, *Eagle*, 50; Weinreb compares *Montbrillant* to *Jean Santeuil*.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Proust, *À La Recherche du temps perdu*, 2:462-467, 486-488.

<sup>74</sup> Proust, *À La Recherche du temps perdu*, 1:3.

because they will inevitably read it as if she were talking about herself, and that they will think she painted an unfair portrait of Rousseau. “Pourquoi prend-on mauvaise opinion d’un homme qui aura conçu un caractère dans un ouvrage quelconque tel que Lovelace, Narcisse, etc. et se sentira-t-on pénétré d’admiration pour l’auteur du *Père de famille* etc.?” she asks. Readers must learn to separate the author from the characters they have created, because the content of a work has, she says, has

nul rapport avec la matière d’être d’un homme. Un grand scélérat peut peindre un caractère sublime en beauté. Je sens bien qu’on suppose toujours que l’homme s’est peint dans son ouvrage, mais cette raison indépendamment de ce qu’elle est très problématique ne peut être de quelque vérité que lorsque l’auteur nous est inconnu. Mais en le connaissant on se trouve pris tous les jours à ce piège. (1:248-249)

Proust will later present a similar argument in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*: that an author’s biography is not necessary to understanding their works.

We have taken the first steps toward uncovering *Montbrillant*’s long-buried message by examining the novel’s place within d’Épinay’s corpus, its structural richness, and some of its formal and stylistic features, in particular those that mark it as a *roman pédagogique*. If the work’s educational characteristics are so prominent, why is it that critics have ignored *Montbrillant*’s pedagogy? An answer comes from tracing the history of the novel’s manuscripts, editions, and reception from the eighteenth century to the present, and indeed this will be our next step.

### Chapter Three: *Montbrillant*'s Manuscript, Publication, and Reception History

An entrenched tradition of reading *Montbrillant* as d'Épinay's memoirs has precluded other interpretations. While some of *Montbrillant*'s content seems to lend itself to autobiographical readings, women writers' works have often been unearthed and deemed suitable for study because of their authors' personal connections to famous men, rather than for their literary merit. Stephanie M. Hilger argues that the focus on famous contemporaries leads to a preference for studying those works by women that are autobiographical, and she shows how this focus also leads to a preference for biographical readings of individual works.<sup>1</sup> In these cases, critics are often more interested in whether or not the work is truthful than in its literary value. D'Épinay's *Montbrillant* fits the pattern Hilger describes. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, editors and critics valued the novel for the true confessions they believed it provided about Diderot, Grimm, Jean-Jacques, and other famous men. These connections attracted attention the work would have doubtless not otherwise received, but they also led us to miss the novel's key messages.

#### Three Camps of Scholars

Various scholars have told the story of *Montbrillant*'s manuscript and publication history, and they can be divided into three camps. In the first, we find Fredericka Macdonald, author of *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A New Criticism* (1906) and that work's translator, Georges Roth,<sup>2</sup> both of whom cast Louise d'Épinay as a kind of villain who victimized her one-time friend Rousseau; to them, *Montbrillant* is a weapon d'Épinay and her scheming friends deployed against him.

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<sup>1</sup> Hilger, *Women Write Back*, 41; 119-120.

<sup>2</sup> For Roth's French translation, see: Macdonald, *La Légende de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

Roth was the editor of the first complete published edition of *Montbrillant* (1951), and the background information he provides in this edition strongly reflects Macdonald's interpretation.

In the second camp, we find Élisabeth Badinter, editor of the 1989 edition of *Montbrillant*, who took the opposite position from Macdonald and Roth in casting d'Épinay as Rousseau's victim.

In the third camp we find revisionists Odette David, Pierre Tyl, and Tanguy L'Aminot; their recent scholarship exposes the flaws in Macdonald's, Roth's, and Badinter's accounts, as well as how the influence of these three earlier critics pervaded nearly all of the *Montbrillant* scholarship through the 1980s and beyond. David's *L'Autobiographie de convenance de Madame d'Épinay, écrivain-philosophe des Lumières: Subversion idéologique et formelle de l'écriture de soi* (2007) in particular provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of every edition of d'Épinay's novel and all of the criticism written in French until 2004. Tyl's 2010 article tracing the history of *Montbrillant*'s publication and reception also provides valuable insights,<sup>3</sup> and L'Aminot's 2010 article specifically addresses the shortcomings of Badinter's approach.<sup>4</sup> Together David, Tyl, and L'Aminot show how, thanks to the efforts of past editors and critics, "Madame d'Épinay s'est trouvée dépossédée de son roman";<sup>5</sup> she has been victimized by *them*. Indeed, each successive retelling of the story of *Montbrillant*'s history has portrayed either Rousseau or d'Épinay as a victim.

I retell this story one more time, drawing on the accounts furnished by Macdonald, Roth, Badinter, David, Tyl, and L'Aminot for two reasons. First, the history of *Montbrillant* reveals how the novel came to be interpreted exclusively as autobiographical. When we see that this

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<sup>3</sup> Tyl, "L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant *des Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay aux Contre-Confessions*."

<sup>4</sup> L'Aminot, "Élisabeth Badinter, Rousseau et les *Contre-Confessions*."

<sup>5</sup> Tyl, 77.

interpretation was imposed on the work by outside forces more so than because of textual evidence in *Montbrillant* itself, we are then free to read it in other ways.

Second, although I align myself with the revisionist camp (that is, David, Tyl, and L'Aminot), I recount *Montbrillant*'s history because the existing revisionist accounts, though they cover much ground, are incomplete. I can add something to their descriptions of the manuscripts, especially manuscript C. Closer examination of alterations made to the manuscripts in the nineteenth century will allow us better to comprehend how and why d'Épinay's novel has been construed as an autobiography. I also add to revisionist accounts an analysis of what American critics have made of d'Épinay's novel. *Montbrillant* has been a part of the feminist project of the recovery of women authors in the last 30-40 years,<sup>6</sup> and a few significant works on d'Épinay, including Weinreb's *Eagle in a Gauze Cage* and Trouille's *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, were published in the United States. I also consider the most recent scholarship on *Montbrillant* in French.<sup>7</sup>

*Montbrillant*'s more than two centuries of publication and reception history tell a story of continuity rather than disruption. Indeed, the novel's manuscripts have a history of being lost and found, both physically and metaphorically. D'Épinay did not publish *Montbrillant* during her lifetime, and Grimm did not publish it after her death. During the French Revolution, the manuscripts were divided up and literally left in obscurity. This obstacle was only overcome

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<sup>6</sup> I use the word "feminist" throughout this chapter in a broad sense: the critical works I analyze are feminist because they treat women's writing and lives in the eighteenth century and are part of a historical moment of unearthing and rehabilitating women authors.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Grangé, *La Destruction des genres. Jane Austen et Madame d'Épinay* (2014). I will not address recent work on d'Épinay that is more focused on *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, although interested readers may find some insights therein that apply to *Montbrillant* as well. See, for example, Kleihues, *Der Dialog als Form. Analysen zu Shaftesbury, Diderot, Madame d'Épinay und Voltaire*. --. "Conversation versus Katechismus. Madame d'Épinays literarische Gestaltung eines innovativen Erziehungskonzepts." --. "Erziehung in Plauderton: Formen des Widerstands gegen die Anthropologisierung der Geschlechterdiskurse bei Madame d'Épinay."

when the manuscripts were recovered in the nineteenth century. Then the lure of commercial success led editors to abridge and alter d'Épinay's text as they saw fit and to cast *Montbrillant* as an autobiography chalk full of celebrity revelations. Their sales-minded reading and their disfiguring of the text to exaggerate its autobiographical dimensions set the course for *Montbrillant* interpretation through to the present day. After tracing the origins of *Montbrillant*'s autobiographical interpretation in the nineteenth century, I will show how the unabridged published editions of the twentieth century and *Montbrillant* criticism, including most of the recent feminist scholarship, have continued and even reinforced this tradition of reading. While d'Épinay's text has been physically found, much of its meaning has been lost or overlooked.

### The History of *Montbrillant*'s Manuscripts

The history of *Montbrillant*'s manuscripts begins in the mid-eighteenth century. Weinreb dates the work to 1756-1762, and argues that d'Épinay could have continued to add to it until no later than 1769.<sup>8</sup> D'Épinay refers to a novel in the humorous verses called “À Tyran le Blanc” that she addressed to Grimm in 1756.<sup>9</sup> In 1760, she considered giving the manuscript to Richardson.<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Galiani dated 2 September 1770, she refers to “un ouvrage très étendu que je me suis avisée de faire, que vous n'avez pas lu et que je veux que vous lisiez un jour”; this work is probably *Montbrillant*.<sup>11</sup> There are also references within *Montbrillant* to a novel that

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<sup>8</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> See *Œuvres de Mme d'Épinay* (éd. Challemeil-Lacour, t. II, p. 163), cited in *Montbrillant* (Roth ed.) 1:viii.

<sup>10</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 73. One reason we know that she is probably referring to *Montbrillant* is that she mentions a character inspired by Rousseau that she uses as a mouthpiece to make a “petite thèse” of educational points. See d'Épinay and Galiani, *Correspondance*. Tyl notes that this “petite thèse” could be a part of *Montbrillant* (78). See also: *Montbrillant*, 3:135-137.

Émilie is writing.<sup>12</sup> In d'Épinay's obituary in the *Correspondance littéraire*, Grimm refers to "l'ébauche d'un long roman" that d'Épinay left behind; he was referring to *Montbrillant*.<sup>13</sup>

When she died, d'Épinay left the manuscripts to Grimm for him to prepare for publication, but he did not publish them. Forced to leave France in 1789, Grimm secretly returned for four months between October 1791 and January 1792. It was during this period, most probably, that he gave a relatively clean copy (referred to as the *copie au net*) of d'Épinay's novel to his trusted secretary, Lecourt de Villière, for safekeeping.<sup>14</sup> D'Épinay edited this copy, so it must have been made before her death. Grimm then left the original manuscript behind when he fled; it was seized along with all the *émigrés'* papers and belongings. The original manuscript spent two years in the Dépôt national de la rue Saint-Marc, and later was taken to the Dépôt des Cordeliers, where Grimm's papers were divided up to be shipped off to various public institutions. This process was undertaken so quickly and carelessly that d'Épinay's manuscript was included in "[t]rente-quatre paquets de paperasses, gazettes et journaux ne méritant aucune description."<sup>15</sup> It is a good thing that at some point, someone decided *Montbrillant* was indeed worth a description. The manuscript was also divided into two parts, one sent to the Archives nationales and the other to the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. Today, the Archives' part is known as manuscript A,<sup>16</sup> the Arsenal part is manuscript B – note that A and B are two parts that together comprise the whole original manuscript – and the "copie au net" that Grimm conferred on his secretary, in other words, the copy of A plus B, is known as manuscript C.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, 3:118, 131, 171-172, 196.

<sup>13</sup> Tyl, 69-70.

<sup>14</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:ix.

<sup>15</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:ix.

<sup>16</sup> David notes that Roth is responsible for this designation (105). See *Montbrillant*, 1:x.



Manuscript A, held at the Archives (cote M. 789), is made up of the first 140 *cahiers*, or notebooks of this work. These notebooks are divided into two different boxes.<sup>17</sup> Each notebook is made up of 4, 8, or 12 sheets of 235 X 190 mm paper fastened together with ribbon.<sup>18</sup> A typical page from ms A has virtually no corrections. According to Odette David and Georges Roth, approximately two-thirds of the pages in ms A have minor corrections or no corrections.<sup>19</sup> In my estimation, the percentage of virtually uncorrected pages is actually higher. This is important because there is a longstanding conspiracy theory that sees *Montbrillant* as a weapon meant to destroy Rousseau's reputation, largely based on the idea that Grimm and Diderot heavily revised d'Épinay's work. Even on a typical page with corrections and insertions, they are not substantial. There are a few additions in ms A that appear to be made in a different hand, but it is because d'Épinay dictated the bulk of the text to her secretary, and then made the corrections in her own handwriting.<sup>20</sup> Compared to ms B, ms A is in relatively good condition. Pieces of the last page are missing, but the rest of the pages are intact. The manuscript is unsigned and untitled; the first thing patrons will see upon untying the first bundle is a note, possibly from Capperonier, who was in charge of the "trriage" of the seized documents to be sent from the depots to public institutions in 1789,<sup>21</sup> identifying the material as a "roman épistolaire" but then citing the passage from the work in which M. de Lisieux stresses that these are veritable memoirs.<sup>22</sup> The note includes a key matching several of the characters to their supposed real-life counterparts. Its message is equivocal: is the work a novel or not? Although the note states that it is a novel, the key and the citation impose an autobiographical reading on the source material

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<sup>17</sup> Carton A has *cahiers* 1-81; Carton B has *cahiers* 82-140 (*Montbrillant*, 1:x).

<sup>18</sup> For information on the manuscripts' physical properties, see *Montbrillant*, 1:x.

<sup>19</sup> David, 105.

<sup>20</sup> David, 105.

<sup>21</sup> Capperonier (1745-1820) was Conservateur de la Bibliothèque Nationale (*Montbrillant*, 1:xi).

<sup>22</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:xi.

and make it impossible to approach *Montbrillant*'s earliest manuscripts without this interpretation in mind.<sup>23</sup>

Manuscript B, at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Cote M. 3158, ancienne cote 260bis. B.F), picks up where ms A leaves off. Ms B is 47 *cahiers*,<sup>24</sup> or 731 sheets of paper (235 X 190 mm each), which are not bound. Like ms A, ms B appears to be largely written out by d'Épinay's secretary and corrected by the author.<sup>25</sup> D'Épinay's edits resulted in the condensation of the last 47 notebooks into 38, when they were copied for ms C, for a final total of 178 *cahiers*, down from 187.<sup>26</sup> Manuscript B appears to be in poor condition, with several pages ripped out at various places throughout the documents. A note by Georges Roth at the beginning of the manuscript informs readers that they are looking at the Pseudo-Mémoires of Mme d'Épinay. Some of the paratextual materials included in the same box with this manuscript, however, contradict this idea. Regardless, as in the case of Manuscript A, those perusing Manuscript B are initially confronted by an authoritative-sounding document, in this case written by a *Montbrillant* expert, which imposes an autobiographical reading.

Besides the last part of *Montbrillant*, Manuscript B includes several documents that reveal something about the history of the work's composition: the preface materials that come from the first version of the proto-novel, which later became *Montbrillant* and which d'Épinay originally titled *Madame de Rambure*; the list of changes to make to the novel, and scraps of paper detailing ideas for other works that d'Épinay may have planned to write.<sup>27</sup> The box also

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<sup>23</sup> Roth (*Montbrillant*, 1:xvii) and Tyl (70) argue that the citation is evidence that the work is actually a novel, because it was a convention for the authors of novels to claim that their works were not novels, but in fact true memoirs, letters, or a true story.

<sup>24</sup> David, 106.

<sup>25</sup> See David, 105; Roth, 1:xiv; and Tyl, 74.

<sup>26</sup> David, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Roth reproduces the complete list; see *Montbrillant*, 3:565-569.

contains *Deux articles de critique littéraire, attribués par une note à Diderot*. The list of projected changes is largely in d'Épinay's handwriting, but there are two suggestions written by Diderot. Grimm may also have provided input.<sup>28</sup> In terms of content, suggested changes for Folio 6, for example, include combining certain characters and households into one. In the manuscripts themselves, the list is titled "changements a faire [*sic*] dans le roman" and "note des changements à faire dans la fable." Note the use of both terms *roman* and *fable*. The first supports a move away from autobiographical reading, as does the content of the proposed changes. We have seen that *fable* may mean either a story designed to instruct or the argument of a novel. The proposed changes for Folio 137 support the first interpretation, because they involved adding the stories of more female characters, who were meant to serve as examples. These characters ended up seduced and unmarried or in a convent. Their stories were to be juxtaposed with a discussion of how children turn out who were educated by certain types of mothers, leading us to believe that these characters were to be included in order to make certain points about mothers educating their own children. Didactic stories reminiscent of these descriptions and that teach similar lessons show up in d'Épinay's later *Conversations d'Émilie*, supporting our theory that *Montbrillant* and *Conversations* are both products of d'Épinay's evolving educational thought. D'Épinay appears to have made some of the changes to *Montbrillant* but not all of them. She wrote notes regarding some of the planned changes throughout Manuscripts A and B, on the back of certain leaves.

Manuscript C, the "copie au net," is located at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (Rés. Ms 126-134). Manuscript C is a (relatively) clean copy and an "exact reproduction"

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<sup>28</sup> David, 57 and *Montbrillant*, 1:xiv.

of ms A and ms B put together.<sup>29</sup> It is “9 volumes in-4° 2300 pages” in Grimm’s scribe Mailly’s handwriting.<sup>30</sup> There is also another hand, X, not mentioned by critics, who copied a single page every few pages. Although ms C is called the “copie au net,” it is clear that d’Épinay was not fully satisfied with it. Critics have been curiously silent on this point, and I believe there is perhaps more work that can be done on ms C. For now, my examination of the manuscript showed that d’Épinay corrected this draft, somewhat obsessively perhaps. Virtually gone are the sentence-and paragraph-length insertions of ms A and B. However, though the corrections are shorter and there are fewer of them – d’Épinay just changed an individual word or a two-to-three word phrase every so often for the most part in ms C – some pages seem to show up to four different ink shades and thicknesses of nibs used, suggesting that, like Flaubert, d’Épinay revisited her pages a number of times in her search for the perfect word.

Roth stresses the beauty of Mailly’s handwriting and describes the lovely binding of this manuscript,<sup>31</sup> and I second those plaudits, but that binding probably contributed to the misreading of ms C for two centuries. Viewers of ms C will see markings from one of its nineteenth-century editors, Jean-Pierre Parison,<sup>32</sup> who was responsible for the *maquillage* that allowed *Montbrillant* to appear as d’Épinay’s memoirs rather than as a novel. “Manuscrit des Mémoires de Madame d’Épinay” is written on the back of the flyleaf. According to my analysis, the handwriting is Parison’s. Also in Parison’s hand is a new introduction presenting the work as memoirs; this two-page document is written on old (probably eighteenth-century) paper that resembles the paper d’Épinay used and that almost (but does not quite) match. It is bound into the volume with the rest of *Montbrillant*, making Parison’s addition fit almost seamlessly in with

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<sup>29</sup> David, 106.

<sup>30</sup> See David, 388; *Montbrillant*, 1:xxvi.

<sup>31</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:xxvi.

<sup>32</sup> Tyl, 74.

the rest of the text. Without knowing it was Parison, one would think that perhaps d'Épinay dictated that portion to a friend or secretary. Because ms B contains some unused preface materials, the presentation of Parison's new preface declaring the work memoirs makes it appear as though that was what d'Épinay settled on as the definitive preface for her work.

Throughout ms C, Parison used a pencil to cross out passages and insert material. For example, Parison put a large X over the novel's entire first letter from the Marquise de Beaufort to M. de Lisieux, in which she implores him to educate Émilie into someone who can marry a noble. This letter is a crucial piece needed to understand the educational impetus behind *Montbrillant* and may indeed be intended to stand in place of a preface; Parison excised it in one fell swoop. Parison also, for example, does away with the details of the process Émilie goes through to obtain the *séparation de biens*, replacing this material with a brief summary.<sup>33</sup> This choice may have had more to do with a desire for brevity rather than for censorship, although it may have been motivated by a desire to protect M. d'Épinay's reputation. Whatever the reason, Parison's edit has the effect of limiting women readers' access to information about how to get a *séparation de biens* and covering up one of the main themes of the work – how women can secure happiness, freedom, and security in spite of the economic, legal, and institutional barriers in their society that would keep them from achieving it. Elsewhere, Parison wrote summaries of passages that he deemed too long on pieces of paper and glued them on top of d'Épinay's text. Luckily, either a past critic had pulled them off or else the glue has decayed sufficiently that one can now lift them and see d'Épinay's original text underneath.

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<sup>33</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 2:16n1. Another example is that Parison cuts parts of the off-color dialogue at Mme Médéric's dinner. (*Montbrillant*, 2:99n2.) Parison does, however, include Émilie's journal entries where it is clear that she has given into Formeuse's entreaties and slept with him, with only minor cuts (*Montbrillant*, 1:495n1 and 496n1-5).

It is clear that past scholars and editors have shaped the experience of reading all three manuscripts. The first thing viewers of ms A see is a nineteenth-century notice telling them it is the “veritable memoirs” of Mme d’Épinay, and the first thing viewers of ms B see is a note from editor Georges Roth identifying the material as the “pseudo-mémoires” of Mme d’Épinay. And in the case of ms C, not only does a note identify the material as d’Épinay’s memoirs, but Parison also wrote directly on the manuscript, inserting his proposed amendments to d’Épinay’s work. Because of his interventions, the condition of ms C as Grimm left it to his secretary was lost, and this paved the way for the domination of an autobiographical interpretation that has continued to this day.

#### The History of *Montbrillant*’s Published Editions and Criticism in the Nineteenth Century

D’Épinay’s work was not published in full until Georges Roth’s 1951 edition. In the nineteenth century, however, several abridged editions of *Montbrillant* were published, playing on d’Épinay’s connection to Rousseau and provoking reactions among the decidedly pro- or anti-Rousseauistes.<sup>34</sup> Their editors promised to arm readers with the knowledge necessary to finally pronounce judgment on who had been right and who had been wrong in the Hermitage Affair, d’Épinay and Rousseau’s famous falling out. Rousseau presents one side of the story in his *Confessions*; *Montbrillant* is presumed to contain d’Épinay’s account of the same events.<sup>35</sup>

The first of these early editions, edited by Jacques-Charles Brunet, who had purchased ms C from one of Grimm’s secretary’s heirs, was published in 1818 under the title *Mémoires et Correspondance de Madame d’Épinay*.<sup>36</sup> Because of the manner in which d’Épinay portrayed

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<sup>34</sup> David, 9.

<sup>35</sup> For more information about this *querelle*, see Weinreb, *Eagle*, 79-97.

<sup>36</sup> See Tyl, 69.

the character of René, inspired by Rousseau – in Pierre Tyl’s words, “hypocrite, odieux avec ses amis, méchant et fou”<sup>37</sup> – Brunet saw the potential for a commercial success in pitting d’Épinay’s work against Rousseau’s *Confessions*.<sup>38</sup> In order to make the most of this opportunity, Brunet had to be seen to publish real memoirs that would present true revelations about the famous Rousseau. To this end, Brunet incorporated some of Rousseau’s real letters (from Rousseau’s *Correspondance*) into *Montbrillant* so that the reader would more readily believe that all of them were real.<sup>39</sup> Some of the letters that d’Épinay had included in *Montbrillant* were closely based on real letters, but none of them were copied verbatim from Rousseau’s actual letters. Brunet used the real versions, not d’Épinay’s pastiched or ventriloquized versions. He also hired the Rousseau scholar Parison to cut and re-write parts of d’Épinay’s text from the “copie au net” manuscript, sometimes replacing truncated material with summaries.<sup>40</sup> In addition, instead of using the names d’Épinay had given to the characters, the *Mémoires* substitutes the names of the real individuals on whom the characters supposedly were based. Finally, in his preface, Brunet presents arguments to try to convince readers that d’Épinay’s novel was actually her memoirs.<sup>41</sup>

The *Mémoires* were so wildly successful that they were re-published two more times in 1818.<sup>42</sup> At this stage, however, most critics remained skeptical toward the *Mémoires*’ purported veracity as memoirs rather than fiction, but this situation started to change after the well-known literary critic Sainte-Beuve discovered d’Épinay and published an article about this work in

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<sup>37</sup> Tyl, 70.

<sup>38</sup> Tyl, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Tyl, 70.

<sup>40</sup> Tyl, 71 and *Montbrillant*, VII-XLII.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of Brunet’s arguments, see Tyl, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Tyl, 71.

1851, which inspired a partial reprinting of the *Mémoires* in 1855.<sup>43</sup> Sainte-Beuve believed in the *Mémoires*' truthfulness.<sup>44</sup> Then, in 1863, the Rousseau scholar Paul Boiteau published a new, more erudite edition,<sup>45</sup> in which he justified the title of *Mémoires*, saying that the few novelistic elements that d'Épinay put into the work "s'en détachent naturellement."<sup>46</sup>

According to Pierre Tyl, what really helped solidify acceptance of the *Mémoires* as veritable memoirs was Lucien Perey<sup>47</sup> and Gaston Maugras' two-volume biography of d'Épinay, *Une femme du monde au XVIIIe siècle: La Jeunesse de Madame d'Épinay* and *Une femme du monde au XVIIIe siècle: Dernières Années de Madame d'Épinay, son salon et ses amis*, which were published in 1882 and 1883, respectively. Unlike Brunet and Parison, who used the "mise au net" version (ms C), Perey and Maugras used the original manuscript, which had been among Grimm's papers seized during the Revolution, the one that had been arbitrarily divided into two parts (A and B). Maurice Tourneux, who, among other publications, produced a bibliography on the history of Paris in the eighteenth century and editions of eighteenth-century works including the *Correspondance littéraire*, had brought d'Épinay's original manuscript to their attention while he was working on his edition of Diderot's *Œuvres*.<sup>48</sup> Instead of publishing the manuscript in its entirety, Perey and Maugras used it as the basis for their biography, and included many passages that had been left out of Brunet and Parison's *Mémoires*, changing them as they saw fit. They also added material from documents they had obtained from d'Épinay's descendants, from material that they unearthed in the Archives nationales, and documents already published by

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<sup>43</sup> In this printing, *Correspondance* was dropped from the title, which thus became simply the *Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay* (Tyl, 72).

<sup>44</sup> Tyl, 72.

<sup>45</sup> Tyl, 72-73.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Tyl, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Alias Luce Herpin (Tyl, 73).

<sup>48</sup> Tyl, 73.



Brunet.<sup>49</sup> Because their main source was d'Épinay's manuscript, as part of their marketing strategy, they stressed to their readers that d'Épinay had hardly changed any details from the historical record, and moreover, they claimed that the 1818 editions were authentic memoirs, and that they were simply completing them.<sup>50</sup> Again, there was no question of using d'Épinay's characters' names in Perey and Maugras.<sup>51</sup> Other changes they made to the text also distorted d'Épinay's meaning. For example, in the second paragraph of *Montbrillant's* second preface, d'Épinay's original text reads, "C'est à vous surtout, ô mon Tuteur, que je veux paraître telle que je suis, et aux yeux de qui il m'importe de me justifier" (1:7). Perey and Maugras deleted the words "ô mon Tuteur" so that instead of wishing to show herself as she really is (wording already reminiscent of Rousseau's *Confessions*) just to her tutor (and to readers, of course, though she did not address them directly), Mme de Montbrillant now desires a nebulous "vous" – perhaps all of the public, whom she addresses directly – to be her judge, wording that is still closer to that which Rousseau uses in his *Confessions*.

Given that at the time, *Montbrillant* was marketed as d'Épinay's memoirs, it is hardly surprising that nineteenth-century criticism of the novel focused largely on debates concerning the memoirs' authenticity.<sup>52</sup> Critics who questioned it included Charles-Marie Feletz, chronicler at the *Journal des Débats*, and Pauline de Meulan, writing for the *Archives philosophiques*. The Rousseau specialist Victor-Donatien Musset-Pathay, while not recognizing Parison's hand, recognized that *someone* had interfered with ms C, and hypothesized that it had been Grimm. In 1869, Paul-Armand Challemeil-Lacour, literary critic at the *Temps* and editor of *Mes Moments*

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<sup>49</sup> Tyl, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Tyl, 73.

<sup>51</sup> For more information on the biographies Perey and Maugras produced and their use of d'Épinay's manuscripts, see Tyl.

<sup>52</sup> Readers interested in knowing more about nineteenth-century critics' stances vis-à-vis *Montbrillant* can find more comprehensive overviews of their positions in Tyl and David.

*heureux* and *Les Lettres à mon fils*, stressed the *Mémoires*' novelistic qualities, noting how "calculated" and "arranged" the work's different elements seemed.<sup>53</sup>

Critics also focused on deciding whether d'Épinay or Rousseau had been the more wronged and more justified party in their famous quarrel and on providing moral assessments of each party's character. Musset-Pathay, for example, sided with Rousseau, finding that the *Mémoires* "calomnient les morts, médisent des vivans,"<sup>54</sup> while Paul Boiteau, on the other hand, concluded that they proved that "Jean-Jacques ne nous a pas trompés en écrivant ses *Confessions*, et que les Mémoires de madame d'Épinay, loin de rendre suspecte sa mémoire, sont un involontaire témoignage rendu envers elle."<sup>55</sup> Many nineteenth-century critics, like Saint-Marc Girardin (1853)<sup>56</sup> and Louis Enault (1855),<sup>57</sup> sided with d'Épinay. In an article about Rousseau, Girardin noted that "[...] tandis que Rousseau prenait Mme d'Épinay pour objet de sa manie soupçonneuse, Mme d'Épinay prenait elle-même pour Rousseau de la pitié et de l'indifférence."<sup>58</sup> The tide would turn more in Rousseau's favor at the start of the twentieth century.

#### History of *Montbrillant*'s Published Editions in the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century, the major milestones in *Montbrillant*'s publication history were the reappearance of the original manuscript, followed by a Rousseau-related discovery and two complete published editions. Although Tourneux, Perey, and Maugras knew about

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<sup>53</sup> Tyl, 71-72.

<sup>54</sup> Musset-Pathay, *Anecdotes inédites pour faire suite aux Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay*, 3. Cited in David, 31-33.

<sup>55</sup> *Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay*, Boiteau, introduction p. IV. See David, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Girardin, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau : sa vie et ses ouvrages," Chapter 7, p. 1076. See David, 43-44.

<sup>57</sup> David, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Girardin, 1103. Cited in David, 44.

*Montbrillant*'s original manuscript (A and B) and its existence was revealed to the public in 1885, Perey and Maugras in particular kept quiet about it, and it was not until the early twentieth century that scholars became aware of its existence on a wider scale, owing, argues Odette David, to the one scholar who perhaps more than any other set the course of *Montbrillant* criticism in the twentieth century through her work with the novel's manuscripts, the British Rousseau scholar and apologist Fredericka Macdonald.<sup>59</sup>

Macdonald wanted to verify a theory that Musset-Pathay had proposed in 1818 but had not been able to confirm because he did not have access to the manuscripts, namely that Grimm was the real author of *Montbrillant*, having used papers left to him by d'Épinay as a base.<sup>60</sup> Examining mss A, B, and C in 1895,<sup>61</sup> Macdonald discovered that some of the writing in the margins of ms A seemed to be in a different hand and in darker ink than the rest of the text, especially in the parts that concerned René, the character inspired by Rousseau.<sup>62</sup> Macdonald also observed that ms B was heavily edited, and that some documents indicated d'Épinay's original intention to write a novel.<sup>63</sup> In addition, she noted that Diderot's handwriting is found among the "Notes des changements à faire dans la fable," and that the René character bears certain similarities to negative portraits of Rousseau by Diderot and Grimm. On the other hand, Volx, the character based on Grimm, plays an important and flattering role in the novel.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See David, 49-50 and Tyl, 73-74.

<sup>60</sup> Tyl, 71-72.

<sup>61</sup> Tyl, 73.

<sup>62</sup> See Fredericka Macdonald, trans. Roth, *La Légende de J.-J. Rousseau*, 50 and Roth's summary of how Macdonald arrived at her conclusions (*Montbrillant*, 1:xii-xiii).

<sup>63</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:xiii.

<sup>64</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:xiv.

Ms C, which bears the marks of Parison's editing, also appeared to Macdonald to have been tampered with by someone other than d'Épinay.<sup>65</sup> But Macdonald later realized that the presence of different handwriting and the variations in ink shades was to be explained by the fact that the manuscript had been written by d'Épinay's secretary and corrected by d'Épinay herself.<sup>66</sup> This realization notwithstanding, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: a New Criticism* (1906), Macdonald claimed to have discovered definite evidence in the *Montbrillant* manuscripts that Rousseau had not been unjustly paranoid after all, because the "cabale philosophique" he feared,<sup>67</sup> a group comprised of d'Épinay and her *philosophe* associates, Diderot and Grimm, had indeed been out to get him. Macdonald alleges that these three, but especially Diderot and Grimm, had taken a draft of d'Épinay's *Montbrillant* and significantly reworked it,<sup>68</sup> in order to make the Rousseau character, René, look much more unflattering than before. Macdonald saw it as a sort of preemptive strike in response to rumors that Rousseau was preparing a damning memoir that would blacken the reputations of d'Épinay and her friends for posterity. This damning memoir was, of course, Rousseau's *Confessions*, in which Jean-Jacques promises to reveal himself to his reader "dans toute la vérité de la nature."<sup>69</sup> By placing the blame for the *complot* on Diderot and Grimm rather than on d'Épinay herself, because she could not imagine the generous d'Épinay doing it,<sup>70</sup> Macdonald in a sense takes something away from d'Épinay's authorship. It is as though the kind but weak-willed d'Épinay ceded control of her work and let

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<sup>65</sup> Tyl, 74.

<sup>66</sup> Tyl, 74.

<sup>67</sup> ARTFL: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778. [1789], *Les Confessions* (H. Launette & C, Paris). Book XI, p. 803.

<sup>68</sup> Macdonald does not believe that d'Épinay was responsible for alterations to the text that were unflattering to Rousseau (Tyl, 74).

<sup>69</sup> *Œuvres de J.-J. Rousseau. Les Confessions*. 4 vols. Paris : René Hilsum, 1931. T.1, p. 9, gallica.bnf.fr/

<sup>70</sup> Tyl, 74.

her colleagues commandeer her massive novel project for their own ends: besmirching Rousseau's reputation for posterity. Indeed, Macdonald cannot imagine any reason why d'Épinay herself would have included such an uncharitable portrait of Rousseau, an idea that merits further examination.

By saying that *Montbrillant's* re-writing was done to counter the *Confessions* in a kind of war of reputations between the authors and by attempting to parse out the facts of what really happened in the Hermitage Affair (while, however, maintaining a pro-Rousseau bias), Macdonald, even more strongly, perhaps, than nineteenth-century editors, put an autobiographical emphasis on *Montbrillant* interpretation. The upshot of this was to suggest that the work ought to be judged chiefly based on factual accuracy, equated somehow with sincerity – as opposed to self-interested self-aggrandizement. Many critics agree that sincerity does not require strict adherence to facts. However, the notion of sincerity does imply some degree of truthfulness to some. For Henri Peyre, for example, sincerity required “a close correspondence between the man and the author, an artist's biography and his creation.”<sup>71</sup> Moreover, an author's divulging of truthful information, especially unflattering or damning information, may serve as proof to readers of that author's sincerity. At least, it is a kind of wager an author can make, and Rousseau makes it in his *Confessions*. Aligning d'Épinay's novel with the *Confessions* leads readers to expect that d'Épinay will use *Montbrillant* to justify her actions, as Rousseau did.

Georges Roth, who translated Macdonald's *New Criticism* into French, was also the editor of *Montbrillant's* first unabridged edition, published in 1951. With some demur regarding her methodology, Roth accepted Macdonald's hypothesis that d'Épinay and her associates had

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<sup>71</sup> *Literature and Sincerity*, 11. See also 12, 41.

wronged Rousseau.<sup>72</sup> Like Macdonald, Roth interpreted *Montbrillant* strictly as an autobiographical work, and almost every single page of his edition bears the marks of this reading, starting from the very cover. The work actually bore no title from d'Épinay on the manuscripts, (other than on the *Histoire de Madame de Rambure* fragments), but Roth entitled it *Les Pseudo-mémoires de Mme d'Épinay: Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*. Roth took the second part of the title from the *Histoire de Madame de Rambure*,<sup>73</sup> substituting “Montbrillant” for “Rambure,” as d'Épinay herself did in the text, and from a note in the margin of one of d'Épinay's *Lettres à mon fils* identifying *Montbrillant* as the title of her novel. For the first part, Roth added the *Pseudo-mémoires* designation, imposing an autobiographical interpretation and suggesting that these are simply d'Épinay's memoirs.<sup>74</sup> Although David acknowledges that terms like *mémoires* continue to inscribe d'Épinay's text within past polemics and do not allow d'Épinay's novel to achieve “sa totale autonomie,” when comparing Roth's edition to the nineteenth-century editions that preceded it, David argues that Roth's title, using the word *pseudo*, is an improvement, because it makes clear that these are not d'Épinay's real memoirs.<sup>75</sup> Tyl, on the other hand, points out that Roth's title shows that his only interest in the work is the *remaniement* of d'Épinay's text by Diderot and Grimm, who supposedly aimed to pass it off as d'Épinay's memoirs.<sup>76</sup> I would add to Tyl's critique that, having been compared to Rousseau's *Confessions*, applying the word *pseudo* to d'Épinay's work makes *Montbrillant* sound like a kind of ersatz or lesser memoir, or a memoir whose author did not have the courage of her convictions, a fundamental act of insincerity, as it were.

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<sup>72</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:x.

<sup>73</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:1 and David, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 49n1.

<sup>75</sup> David, 98-99.

<sup>76</sup> Tyl, 75.

In contrast to earlier editions, which substituted the names of actual historical figures for every character, Roth reinstated the characters' fictional names, yet this notwithstanding, he still maintained an autobiographical approach in all other aspects of his edition, not unlike his nineteenth-century editorial predecessors.<sup>77</sup> Commenting on a passage in d'Épinay's second preface in which Mme de Montbrillant explains how appearances were unjustly against her, Roth reveals his position vis-à-vis the text: “‘Mme de Montbrillant’ se disculpe-t-elle par avance contre une calomnie qu’elle prévoit? N’est-ce pas plutôt que Mme d’Épinay, ayant eu vent des lectures faites en 1770-71 par Rousseau de certains chapitres des *Confessions*, s’inquiète d’y répondre pour la postérité?”<sup>78</sup> Putting Mme de Montbrillant in quotes means that to Roth, like to Brunet, Parison, et al., “Mme de Montbrillant” is simply a mask for Mme d’Épinay and for Roth, that mask may perhaps also hide Grimm and Diderot. In addition, Roth includes a key to the supposedly true identities of the other characters in an appendix,<sup>79</sup> and his footnotes throughout the pages of d’Épinay’s text identify them as well.<sup>80</sup> Roth adopted a rigorous, even exhaustive approach toward identifying the real-life counterparts of all the people and places d’Épinay describes in *Montbrillant*, by combing through records including certificates of births, marriages, and deaths, deeds, testaments, police reports, and recollections, by other authors, of the figures thought to have inspired the characters. On some pages, Roth’s notes take up a considerable amount of space, leading David to describe Roth’s notes as “très envahissantes” and distracting

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<sup>77</sup> David, 108. See also: Weinreb, *Eagle*, 49n1.

<sup>78</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:6.

<sup>79</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:577-580.

<sup>80</sup> Roth also includes other types of footnotes besides the biographical ones described in this paragraph. First, he uses ms C as the basis of his edition, but he also includes the variants from mss A and B in his notes and he notes where the text conforms (or not) to the list of “changements à faire dans la fable.” (See David, *Autobiographie*, 107-108 and *Montbrillant*, 1:xiv.)

for the reader.<sup>81</sup> She even calls Roth the “narrateur intrus.”<sup>82</sup> In many ways, then, we see that Roth is not far from his nineteenth-century counterparts in imposing an autobiographical interpretation.

What is more, Roth openly adopts a critical, even disparaging attitude toward *Montbrillant*'s author.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, many of Roth's notes reveal his condescension.<sup>84</sup> For example, Roth comments that in one letter, “la fermeté du ton et la pénétration de ces remarques donnent à croire que Mme d'Épinay utilise ici une lettre authentique. Mais,” he then asks, “de qui?”<sup>85</sup> as though d'Épinay could not have been capable of writing such a letter herself. Roth also assumes that passages that remind him of the writing of one of d'Épinay's contemporaries like Diderot or Duclos must have been inspired or even written by them.<sup>86</sup> At best, then, lacking ideas of her own, d'Épinay had pastiched the style and content of others. In addition to his general condescension, Roth followed nineteenth-century editors as well as Macdonald in continuing to read *Montbrillant* as fundamentally a parallel to Rousseau's *Confessions*, but he brought to that tradition a great deal of scholarly heft.

Élisabeth Badinter in turn picked up on this tradition of reading and definitively consolidated it by publishing, in 1989, a new complete edition of *Montbrillant* under the title *Les Contre-confessions: L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, thus explicitly pitting d'Épinay against Rousseau. The title Roth gave to d'Épinay's novel, *Les Pseudo-mémoires de Madame d'Épinay: l'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, the designation *pseudo-mémoires* reads like a

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<sup>81</sup> David, “Le Narrateur intrus: un stratagème d'auteur,” 99.

<sup>82</sup> David, *Autobiographie de convenance*, 108.

<sup>83</sup> In one example, Roth complains that d'Épinay uses too many names that are too similar to one another. See *Montbrillant*, 1:306n2. See also: Weinreb, *Eagle*, 50n2.

<sup>84</sup> Even some comments in which Roth seems to be praising d'Épinay show condescension. See, for example, *Montbrillant*, 1:312n1.

<sup>85</sup> For the letter in question, see *Montbrillant*, 1:313-315. For Roth's comment, see 1:315n1.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, *Montbrillant*, 2:62n1.



subtitle because although it is listed first, it appears in much smaller type on the cover of Roth's edition, and only *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant* is printed on the flyleaf, the first page of d'Épinay's text, and at the top of every page.<sup>87</sup> Badinter's *Contre-Confessions* designation, however, does not function as a mere subtitle added for clarification; it is the main orientation Badinter presents up front: d'Épinay versus Rousseau.<sup>88</sup> Badinter explains that *les Contre-Confessions* as a title evokes "le double dessein de ce texte 'inqualifiable': à la fois confessions d'une femme du XVIIIe siècle et machine de guerre contre celles de Rousseau."<sup>89</sup> Badinter viewed the Hermitage Affair and d'Épinay's and Rousseau's warring portraits of each other as "l'une des polémiques les plus célèbres de l'histoire de la littérature."<sup>90</sup> From the moment Badinter's edition was published, explains Tanguy L'Aminot, the title *Contre-Confessions* and its attendant associations have dominated in *Montbrillant* interpretation generally, from discussions among *universitaires* and students to the cover design of the book, with the unfortunate result that "le livre semble se réduire à la querelle qui opposa les philosophes. Tout le reste et toute sa richesse paraissent secondaires ou anecdotiques. [...]"<sup>91</sup> Although like Macdonald and Roth, Badinter reads *Montbrillant* as a parallel to the *Confessions*, Badinter instead frames d'Épinay as Rousseau's victim and makes clear that she will come to d'Épinay's defense in the wake of Roth and Macdonald's defense of Rousseau.<sup>92</sup> In this respect, Badinter's orientation to the text is similar to that of certain nineteenth-century editors and critics sympathetic to d'Épinay.

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<sup>87</sup> Weinreb (*Eagle*, 49n1) also refers to the *Pseudo-mémoires* as a "subtitle."

<sup>88</sup> L'Aminot makes a similar point, which I cite on the next page.

<sup>89</sup> See Badinter ed., (p. XVII). (Cited in L'Aminot, 147).

<sup>90</sup> *Ambition*, 95.

<sup>91</sup> 147.

<sup>92</sup> David, 111-113; L'Aminot, 147-148.

Although she disliked Roth's attitude toward d'Épinay, Badinter's edition shows several similarities to his. Notably, she followed Roth's autobiographical reading of the work by using his notes throughout her edition, though shortening them by cutting the opinions to which she objected, and moving the notes to the end.<sup>93</sup> Also like Roth, she used d'Épinay's characters' names in her edition of *Montbrillant*. However, in another work, *Mme du Châtelet, Mme d'Épinay, ou l'Ambition féminine au XVIIIe siècle*, a study of feminine ambition based on the biographies of Mme du Châtelet and Mme d'Épinay, and in *L'Amour en plus*, a history of motherhood, Badinter treats *Montbrillant* as fact and simply takes information from it about the character Émilie de Montbrillant's life and assumes it must have been true for Louise d'Épinay, too.<sup>94</sup> Tanguy L'Aminot has described many of the weaknesses of Badinter's approach to d'Épinay and her tendency to turn facts and quotations to suit her arguments.<sup>95</sup> L'Aminot objects to Badinter's framing of d'Épinay as Rousseau's victim, which, he says, does more to further an anti-Rousseau agenda than to elucidate the literary value of d'Épinay's work.<sup>96</sup> As Jacques Domenech notes, we are still lacking "un établissement et une édition scientifiques sous forme d'œuvres complètes" for d'Épinay.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps one day soon we will have an edition that seeks to

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<sup>93</sup> See David, 111.

<sup>94</sup> Although Badinter acknowledges that *Montbrillant* contains inaccuracies (*Ambition*, 153), she nonetheless states that d'Épinay's novel "n'était autre que son histoire" (*Ambition*, 356) and treats details from *Montbrillant* as though they are facts about d'Épinay's life. See, for example, *Ambition*, n107, which cites *Montbrillant*, 1:239 as Badinter's source regarding what d'Épinay read.

<sup>95</sup> See L'Aminot, "Élisabeth Badinter, Rousseau et les *Contre-Confessions*."

<sup>96</sup> L'Aminot identifies a shrewdly commercial motive on Badinter's part: readers of the *Contre-confessions* would feel like revolutionaries battling against *phallogrates* who would like to take away women's right to speak (147-148).

<sup>97</sup> Domenech, 12.

rectify some of the problems of past editions.<sup>98</sup> In the meantime, for all its weaknesses, the Roth edition of *Montbrillant* remains the edition that is considered the scholarly standard.<sup>99</sup>

### Twentieth-Century Criticism Before 1983

In light of the work's manuscript and publication history, it is not surprising that other twentieth-century critics besides Macdonald treated *Montbrillant* as an autobiography in their analyses and focused on teasing out the facts surrounding d'Épinay's historical interactions with Rousseau and passing judgment on one or the other party.<sup>100</sup> Other critics take a wider view of d'Épinay's biography than simply the Hermitage Affair, but focus instead on d'Épinay's relationships, family background, personality, and looks, rather than on her writing.<sup>101</sup> Some twentieth-century critics began to explore the literary analysis of *Montbrillant*, without, however,

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<sup>98</sup> Some foreign-language editions of d'Épinay's works are available. Many of these are based on nineteenth-century editions and follow their conventions of abridging *Montbrillant*, considering it a memoir, and using the real-life names of the people who inspired the fictional characters. See d'Épinay, *Memoirs of Madame d'Épinay*. d'Épinay, *Memoirs and Correspondance of Madame d'Épinay*. Translated and with an introduction by E. G. Allingham. D'Épinay, *The memoirs and correspondance of Madame d'Épinay*. Translated with an introduction and brief notes by J. H. Freese. D'Épinay, *Gli ultimi anni della Signora d'Épinay; Lettere inedite all'abate Galiani (1773-1782)*. D'Épinay, *La Signora d'Épinay e l'abate Galiani: Lettere inedite (1769-1772)*. Galiani, *Briefe an Madame d'Épinay und andere Freunde in Paris, 1769-1781 [von] Abbé Galiani*. D'Épinay, *De Jeugd van Madame d'Épinay*.

<sup>99</sup> Pierre Chartier, personal communication, October 2012; Sylvain Menant and Geneviève Artigas-Menant, personal communication, October 2012. David notes that when Badinter cut down Roth's notes for her 1989 edition, some valuable details were lost (*Autobiographie* 111).

<sup>100</sup> Hippolyte Buffenoir (1901), Gustave Charlier (1931), Henri Guillemin (1941), and Émile Henriot (1952) exemplify this approach. Readers interested in a comprehensive overview and discussion of each of the critical works on d'Épinay published in France through 2004 will find David's *Autobiographie de convenance* a valuable source of information. See pages 49-155. See also Buffenoir, *La Comtesse d'Houdetot, une amie de J.-J. Rousseau*. Charlier, "Mme d'Épinay et J.-J. Rousseau." Guillemin, "Les Affaires de l'Ermitage." Henriot, "Les Mémoires arrangés de Madame d'Épinay."

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Rey, Auguste. *Le Château de la Chevrette et Mme d'Épinay* (1903).

completely moving beyond autobiography.<sup>102</sup> Others examined d'Épinay's literary choices, but used them to evaluate d'Épinay's psychology rather than literary questions.<sup>103</sup> Others wrote biographies that still treat information from *Montbrillant* as fact and consider its characters synonymous with the real people who inspired them.<sup>104</sup> Others still were interested in what d'Épinay's writings can tell us about the lives, philosophies, and condition of women in the eighteenth century and why d'Épinay's life in particular was fulfilling.<sup>105</sup> All of these approaches use the study of *Montbrillant*'s text as a starting point from which to draw biographical meanings.

For many of the critics, who was right and who was wrong in the Hermitage Affair continued to be the “question sempiternelle,”<sup>106</sup> as David so aptly puts it, and a kind of irresolvable aporia that distracted from *Montbrillant*'s literary, philosophical, and ethical value. In such approaches, d'Épinay's worth as an author is fundamentally irrelevant, for what is being judged is her real-life behavior and the truthfulness of her account.<sup>107</sup> Many critics have equated the latter with d'Épinay's sincerity, but ironically, they miss her message about the importance of teaching children to be sincere because they are so focused on whether or not she presented the facts of her life accurately. Judging an author of a work perceived as an autobiography on the

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<sup>102</sup> Dominique Aury (1953), for example, accords space to *Montbrillant*'s literary value, but still ends up judging sincerity, concluding that Rousseau's motive in writing the *Confessions* was purer than d'Épinay's in writing *Montbrillant*. Yvon Belaval (1952) also begins to analyze *Montbrillant*'s literary characteristics, but focuses more on the historical aspects of the supposed *complot* against Rousseau. See Aury, *Les dangers de la vertu*. Belaval, *Revue Critique*, « Notes-Littérature », *Les Pseudo-Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay*.

<sup>103</sup> See Legros, *Mme d'Épinay valenciennoise* (1920).

<sup>104</sup> See Valentino, *Une Femme d'esprit sous Louis XV : Madame d'Épinay* (1952). See also David, 122.

<sup>105</sup> See Mauzi, *L'idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée françaises au XVIIIe siècle* (1960). Hoffmann, “*L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant ou l'École de la Femme*” (1963).

<sup>106</sup> David, 120.

<sup>107</sup> For an example of the kinds of judgments *Montbrillant* seems to invite, see Badinter, *Ambition*, 153-154.

truthfulness of their words is deeply ingrained in our ethos, however, as it was for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics before us. We would all consider her a better author if we could be sure she was sincere, in the way we mean sincere – truthful in her autobiography. Critics’ use of sincerity as a measure of d’Épinay’s worth as an author is a sign that the very ideals she promoted, including learning to write in an extremely sincere manner, have come to dominate our values system. We do not like fabricated memoirs, and we do not respect their authors. The James Frey controversy comes to mind as a contemporary example in the United States.<sup>108</sup> It is a shame, then, that d’Épinay did not present her ideas on sincerity to us in the form of a memoir – a form that is comprehensible to us, that we could more readily understand. We are in a sense children of Rousseau, who claimed that his *Confessions*’ value lay in their very sincerity.<sup>109</sup>

“Être éternel, rassemble autour de moi l’innombrable foule de mes semblables; qu’ils écoutent mes confessions, qu’ils gémissent de mes indignités, qu’ils rougissent de mes misères. Que chacun d’eux découvre à son tour son cœur aux pieds de ton trône avec la même sincérité; et puis qu’un seul te dise, s’il l’ose: *Je fus meilleur que cet homme-là.*”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The author, whose supposed memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, had been featured on Oprah’s Book Club, admitted that he fabricated some of the book’s events. In 2006, readers were able to request a refund for the harms caused them by reading a book they believed to be a memoir but which was not in fact entirely true. To get their money back, they had to swear they bought the book *because* it was a memoir (in other words, because it was not a novel.) Note that Frey had originally tried to sell the book as a novel, but his commercial success came in some measure from calling it a memoir and from claiming to have lived the experiences recounted and for embodying what they represent while appearing on Oprah Winfrey’s television show. Newer editions of the book include a note explaining the situation to readers. See Frey, *A Million Little Pieces* and *My Friend Leonard*. For stories in the press about the controversy, see Caulfield Rybak, “Is Minnesota memoir a million fabrications? Bestselling author James Frey’s credibility scrutinized.” Cohen, “Oprah’s Grand Delusion.”

<sup>109</sup> See Caillois, *Babel*, especially 121-133.

<sup>110</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Alain Grosrichard, ed. *Les Confessions I: Livres I à VI*. 2nd edition. Paris: GF Flammarion, 2003; 1:30.

Rousseau also suggested that his originality lay in his sincerity. Originality grew in importance as a value for evaluating literature over the course of the nineteenth century. Rousseau was thus ahead of his time in stressing his originality – and his sincerity, another value that grew in importance in the same period. In the two centuries hence, originality and sincerity have become all the more intimately linked, especially during the Romantic period, to the point where it is now a commonplace that every writer has an individual style and that to be a great writer, one must live a very interesting – even irregular – life and do things like sport green hair and walk a lobster on a leash, because life and work have become ever more necessarily consubstantial. D'Épinay seems to anticipate this development in the first *Montbrillant* preface where M. de Lisieux claims that the letters' value comes from their qualities, which in turn come from Émilie's soul, but she was a little too early, and was writing those lines several years before Rousseau even started work on his *Confessions*. Worse still, she was writing a fictionalized account. The assumption that life and work are necessarily of one substance in the works of early modern and Enlightenment women compound our modern demands for authenticity and our idea of what sincere writing looks like.

As one of the foundational works in the genre of supposedly sincere memoir, Rousseau's *Confessions* has, to a certain degree, become a standard measuring stick or reference point for classifying and judging autobiography. In Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique*, for example, a now-classic work that codifies many conventions of autobiography, the *Confessions* are used, alongside Gide, as one of the main touchstones. When past and present critics read *Montbrillant* as memoir and judge its truthfulness and sincerity, they are imposing our value system, which was irrevocably impacted by Rousseau and the Romantics, onto a pre-*Confessions* work and a pre-Romantic author.

We cannot use the *Confessions*' sincerity as a measuring stick for judging *Montbrillant*, however. David has convincingly shown why d'Épinay's novel could not possibly be the *Confessions*: in order to prove that her sincerity matched Rousseau's, d'Épinay would have had to use her own name for the protagonist and to make some unflattering truthful revelations to her readers, but as a woman and a noble, she simply could not write with the same candor as Rousseau due to societal expectations.<sup>111</sup>

It seems almost as though d'Épinay would have been better off in the eyes of modern critics if she had written a memoir that more closely replicated the details of her life, even if she had "sinned bigger." As long as she confessed "more," we would not reproach her... but then again, we might. Because she was a woman, d'Épinay would probably then be criticized more harshly for unseemly conduct than a male author.

Twentieth-century critics who considered *Montbrillant*'s literary features but read it as an autobiography or autobiographical novel had other reasons to criticize the text, including that its literary technique seems inconsistent, especially in the novel's latter parts, for reasons including that M. de Lisieux has a reduced role or that the work seems to become too polemical.<sup>112</sup>

Reading *Montbrillant* as *roman pédagogique* allows for other interpretations, however. M. de Lisieux's gradual withdrawing from the story corresponds to Émilie's development as an individual and as an educator in her own right; he is almost absent at the moment of Émilie's pedagogical apotheosis. The last two-thirds of the novel contain many of d'Épinay's caricatures

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<sup>111</sup> David, 263; 275.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Simha, Evelyn Singer. "An Eagle in a Cage of Gauze: Mme d'Épinay's *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*." Order No. 6913804 Yale University, 1968. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 25 June 2015. (Unpublished dissertation.) See especially pp. 156, 187-188, 215. See also Trapnell, Maryse. "The *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*: A Critical Analysis of Madame d'Épinay's Confession and Self-Justification." Order No. 7305017 University of Pittsburgh, 1972. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 25 June 2015. (Unpublished dissertation.) See especially pp. 156, 158.

of her contemporaries' educational views, especially those of Rousseau and Duclos. These caricatures reinforce her educational agenda. Read as an educational novel, these features no longer appear as weaknesses but as buttresses to the work's argument, and rather than an addendum unrelated to *Émilie's* earlier life experiences, the last third of the novel serves an important purpose in an integrated whole.

### Montbrillant's Critical Reception, 1983-2017

It seems reasonable to assume that we might see a difference in how critics talk about *Montbrillant* starting in the 1980s, when many feminist scholars undertook to recover and rehabilitate the works of women authors and developed new ways of reading their works and thinking about their autobiographies.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, d'Épinay has squarely been a part of this movement for at least the last 35 years, starting with Élisabeth Badinter's 1983 *Émilie, Émilie, ou l'Ambition féminine*.<sup>114</sup> Badinter's 1989 edition of *Montbrillant* also consciously drew feminist attention to this work and to d'Épinay's life, and was followed in this regard by a handful of other scholars. We might think, then, that critics would have begun focusing on what d'Épinay wrote rather than exclusively on the details of her life. However, although there has been some evolution in the last few years, with few exceptions and in fundamental ways, late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century d'Épinay criticism is largely defined by an autobiographical approach and is not as far removed from the marketing strategies embraced by nineteenth-century editors as we might think.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Gilmore, *Autobiographics*.

<sup>114</sup> The title changed to *Mme du Châtelet, Mme d'Épinay ou l'Ambition féminine au XVIIIe siècle* with the second edition in 2006.

<sup>115</sup> Interested readers can find a short mention of d'Épinay that reflects many of the ways she has traditionally been characterized in: Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile, ou, de l'éducation*.



Examining this body of work chronologically, we can see a shift in focus away from the biographical details of d'Épinay's life and toward her writing.<sup>116</sup> We also see a second shift away from the idea that d'Épinay was exclusively *influenced* by the great men in her life, especially Rousseau, and contributed nothing in return.<sup>117</sup> Instead, over time, the criticism begins to promote the idea that she could hold her own intellectually with the likes of Rousseau and Diderot and that she was truly their peer,<sup>118</sup> although some critics make another kind of feminist argument about the conditions of women's lives in the eighteenth century that tends to downplay d'Épinay's contributions by asserting that she must have gotten her educational ideas from Rousseau, Grimm, and Duclos because she would have had to, their level of education being far superior to hers.<sup>119</sup> Some critics take d'Épinay's extreme modesty as a sign that she would not have known anything without her male interlocutors, while others see this more as a self-

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[Introduction, bibliographie, notes, et index analytique par François et Pierre Richard]. Paris: Garnier frères, 1961 ; 2-3.

<sup>116</sup> Badinter's *Ambition* (1983) treats *Montbrillant* as a more-or-less trustworthy account of d'Épinay's life and states that because of d'Épinay's supposed lack of imagination, she had to retell her own life rather than inventing a new story (84-86), but in her preface to her edition of *Montbrillant*, Badinter argues for a more literary reading of d'Épinay's novel (see David 115). Writing in 1993, Weinreb argues that the content and richness of d'Épinay's work has been largely overshadowed by d'Épinay's relationship with Rousseau and remains understudied (see *Eagle*, 7, 9-10). Weinreb focuses on d'Épinay's writing rather than her relationships (11, 13). Mary Seidman Trouille's 1997 *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Readers Read Rousseau* also deals more with d'Épinay's writing than her life story (see 102). Odette David laments the lack of attention paid to "la véritable valeur littéraire et philosophique" of *Montbrillant*, which she aims in part to fill (p. 100 in Domenech book). See also *L'Autobiographie de convenance*, 161.

<sup>117</sup> For example, in Badinter's account d'Épinay principally has warm feelings, material help, and the inspiration provided by the moving sight of her raising her own children to offer Rousseau (see *Ambition* 95, 97, 221-223). However, Badinter acknowledges that some of d'Épinay's ideas diverge from Rousseau's (224). In contrast, Weinreb bluntly states, "It has been taken for granted that the donor of ideas on education was Rousseau and that the recipient d'Épinay [...] there is pervasive argument to the contrary" (*Eagle*, 35-36).

<sup>118</sup> Mary Trouille's *Sexual Politics* exemplifies this approach.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Badinter, *Ambition*, 49n190, 157, 172, 211, 213-214, 221-224, 226.

presentation strategy that allowed her to be accepted in society as a woman intellectual.<sup>120</sup> Some critics attempt to parse out the historical facts of d'Épinay and Rousseau's quarrel in order to rehabilitate d'Épinay, arguing that this would inspire more interest in her writings.<sup>121</sup> Others present an apologetics for *Montbrillant*'s features, explaining the social and gender-related circumstances that forced d'Épinay to mask her identity and those of her contemporaries, explaining, in other words, why d'Épinay's novel could not be exactly like Rousseau's *Confessions*.<sup>122</sup> In spite of the generally positive shifts, two problematic ideas remain constant across this collection of criticism: first, that the content of d'Épinay's works was overwhelmingly a response to Rousseau's writings,<sup>123</sup> and second, that the novel is largely, if not exclusively, an autobiographical work. Listing d'Épinay's connections to men like Diderot, Voltaire, Duclos, Grimm, Galiani, Mozart, and above all, Jean-Jacques, is still – as it was in the nineteenth century – a common way of marketing d'Épinay scholarship and of justifying interest in her work.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> See, for example, Badinter, *Ambition*, 213; 227. Badinter also states that d'Épinay's modesty may have been strategic, however.

<sup>121</sup> Weinreb devotes a chapter entitled "The Hermitage: The Economics of Friendship" in the center of her book, to the quarrel and after examining the evidence, comes to d'Épinay's defense (79-97). Weinreb implies that posterity has overlooked d'Épinay's writings because after reading the *Confessions*, readers thought that d'Épinay was a bad person (97).

<sup>122</sup> See Odette David's 2007 *Autobiographie de convenance*. David's arguments are compelling, but the one problem is that the discussion ends up being reactive, and *Montbrillant* is defined by the *Confessions*. It is harder to see what else it might be as a literary work. In addition, the *Confessions* has a longstanding reputation of greatness, and there is a danger that *Montbrillant* will be seen as derivative and lesser, because d'Épinay was not able to achieve what Rousseau achieved, even though it was because of circumstances beyond her control.

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, Trouille, *Sexual Politics*, 96-97. To be fair, in its method, *Sexual Politics* discusses a number of different women authors' relationships with Rousseau, including d'Épinay's; the cover art even features a larger portrait of Jean-Jacques surrounded by smaller portraits representing the women authors influenced by him.

<sup>124</sup> *L'œuvre de Madame d'Épinay, écrivain-philosophe des Lumières*, edited by Jacques Domenech (2010), which contains the *Actes du premier colloque international consacré à Madame d'Épinay* – a publication that presents a range of approaches to d'Épinay's work – has a

Some of the emphasis on autobiography, especially as it concerns the d'Épinay-Rousseau relationship is, of course, justified, because the two authors discussed ideas with each other, because their writings were mutually influenced, and because of the interest generated by their tumultuous relationship. But a focus on their relationship can only be justified up to a point, especially as Rousseau's literary output has been studied separately from d'Épinay's, but d'Épinay's has only rarely been studied except as part of her relationship to Rousseau or the other famous men she knew. If we want to get d'Épinay out from under Rousseau's shadow, instead of defending d'Épinay's historical actions, a more productive approach would be to help d'Épinay secure a place in literary history by discussing the literary merits of her works. It is also high time to consider how d'Épinay's contributions might have been necessary to Rousseau's writings, a reversal of the traditional way critics approach the two authors.

Happily, it does seem as if scholarship on d'Épinay is opening up to a wider variety of approaches at the present time,<sup>125</sup> and some articles have made important contributions to the

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blurb on the back cover that begins by mentioning d'Épinay's connections to a number of famous men. The front cover has a lithograph by Henri Baron showing d'Épinay benevolently offering the Hermitage to Rousseau, while he is worshipfully bent over, kissing her hand, thus emphasizing their relationship and d'Épinay's role as a helpful benefactress to another writer. The Liotard portraits of d'Épinay are another popular choice for cover art (see bibliography). To Weinreb, one of these portraits shows the importance of reading in d'Épinay's life ("Double Vision," 398). However, it seems a shame that more books have not used the Carmontelle watercolor of d'Épinay sitting at her desk using a pen to change something on manuscript pages filled with writing.

<sup>125</sup> The *Actes du premier colloque international consacré à Madame d'Épinay* serve as a good example. Some essays therein, like Cécile Cavillac's "Ironie et sensibilité dans l'*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*" (103-118) and Jérémie Grangé's "*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant : pourquoi la polyphonie énonciative ?*" (61-68) discuss the stylistic and rhetorical features of d'Épinay's writing. Others, like Pierre Tyl's "*L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant des Mémoires de Madame d'Épinay aux Contre-Confessions*" (69-78) and Tanguy L'Aminot's "Élisabeth Badinter, Rousseau et les *Contre-Confessions* : un détournement médiatique et antirousseauiste de l'ère mitterrandienne" (133-154) reexamine *Montbrillant*'s publication and reception history. Others discuss d'Épinay's context, including her relationships with famous men, but consider d'Épinay's intellectual contributions. See, for example, Mélinda Caron's

literary analysis of *Montbrillant*.<sup>126</sup> Some recent criticism, however, still reflects a tendency to criticize the novel for its perceived inconsistency, lack of unity, or incoherence.<sup>127</sup> In contrast, I think that reading *Montbrillant* as an educational novel demonstrates that its author had a unified and eminently coherent project: to share with readers her ideal pedagogical program, to which we now turn.

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“Louise d’Épinay et le ‘petit comité. Représentation épistolaire de la vie de société dans la correspondance avec Ferdinando Galiani” (15-30) and Jacques Domenech’s “Le roman d’*Émile* : Madame d’Épinay et Rousseau entre fiction et théorie. Interdépendance entre pratique et théorie de l’éducation... ou le rejet préalable des autres systèmes d’éducation” (269-280) discusses d’Épinay’s work in relationship to Rousseau’s.

<sup>126</sup> Notable examples include Cécile Cavaillac’s “Ironie et sensibilité dans l’*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*” and Colette Cazenobe’s “L’*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*: un laboratoire de formes romanesques.”

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Jérémie Grangé’s 2014 *La Destruction des genres: Jane Austen et Madame d’Épinay*. Grangé essentially agrees with Cazenobe that *Montbrillant* displays the characteristics of many genres, but where Cazenobe sees this as evidence that d’Épinay was an innovator of the then-developing novel form who had a coherent vision for her project, Grangé sees evidence that d’Épinay’s multi-genre work lacks a unifying message or synthesis and that this perhaps reflects the author’s lack of control over her own project (14-15). Grangé finds that *Montbrillant* does not fit together and that it displays the scars or fissures that reveal that women authors like Jane Austen and d’Épinay demonstrated the inadequacy of existing sentimental forms, while failing to present viable alternatives. (See, for example, 208-209.) In his reading, d’Épinay failed to create a unified first-person voice because *Émilie*’s “I” is fragmented into letters and the journal and because the novel is polyphonic.

Part Two:

Reading *Montbrillant* as *Roman pédagogique*

## Chapter Four: Teaching and Learning by Example

In the years d'Épinay was writing, educational treatises proliferated in Europe. The principal questions of moral and intellectual formation of the day included: are parents well suited to educate their own children, or are schools or private tutors better? Are children well suited to learn? What is the best method of education? And, can one raise children to be virtuous in a corrupt society?<sup>1</sup> Today education may be underfunded and undervalued, but for eighteenth-century *philosophes*, education was the key to transforming society. They read earlier educational thinkers like Locke, adding their own stamp to their ideas. They passionately debated the merits of different types of education – and how best to present these ideas to their publics.

We recall that for Grimm, the ideal form for an educational treatise would not be a treatise at all, but rather a stealth treatise in the form of a novel whose didactic aims are not immediately evident. This is because, to Grimm, there should be as many educations as there are children, an idea he shares with Locke and Rousseau. Locke and Rousseau, however, present their precepts bald, while Grimm prefers to show how to tailor a plan of education to a specific child's needs and nature. For Grimm, the *rabâchage* of precepts is boring, mechanical, and inefficacious. By presenting the story of an individual child's education, Grimm confronts readers with an example they have to think about. The educational novel involves readers much more deeply than a treatise because it performs a process of triangulation between the practical and the theoretical, the universal and the particular. Readers have to read for symbolism and work to identify the *clefts*. Readers have to deduce the precepts themselves and then figure out

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the big educational questions of the eighteenth century, see Shroff, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel: The Idea of the Gentleman*.

how to apply them to their own unique real-life situations. The educational novel operating by examples teaches readers to think critically.

In *Montbrillant*'s prefatory materials, d'Épinay indicated that “[c]es mémoires doivent [...] servir de leçon aux mères de famille,” one that would show them the dangers of an improper education and the necessity of tailoring an educational program to each individual child (1:4). Past critics have gotten stuck on the “mémoires” part and have seen the educational part as a rather thin justification for d'Épinay to spill the details of her life. In my reading, d'Épinay calls her novel “mémoires” because it is a novelistic convention and because telling the story of her heroine Émilie's life allows d'Épinay to prove her educational arguments by way of illustration. But in any case, d'Épinay seems to have rejected this preface in favor of starting with *Montbrillant*'s first letter from the Marquise de Beaufort to M. de Lisieux exhorting him to take an interest in Émilie's education. This letter works to make the reader take an interest in Émilie's education, too, and is probably much more effective in this regard than the undisguised motive showcased in the abandoned preface. Mme de Beaufort's plaintive expressions of concern over the young girl's plight and her suggestion that Émilie would have many formidable obstacles to overcome but that perhaps, with the right education, she might succeed in becoming a *grand sujet* and marrying a noble involves readers right away.<sup>2</sup> They want to keep reading to see how things will turn out for poor Émilie. This opening points to an explicitly educational motive, without d'Épinay having to spell it out for readers as she did in the discarded preface.

Educational aims underpin the work's entire construction. In a passage appearing relatively early in the work, for example, Émilie writes a letter to her cousin, Mme de Sally, after Émilie has gotten in trouble for showing too much inclination for her cousin M. de Saint-Ulce,

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<sup>2</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 1:5 and 1:9-11.

the future M. de Montbrillant (1:148-150). Mme de Sally has asked Émilie to explain what she thinks are the failings of contemporary education, in what seems to be one of the work's most thinly-disguised devices to allow d'Épinay to insert explicitly her thoughts on education into the novel. But it is not simply dropped into the text; this manifesto serves as an anchoring point against which the characters' lived experiences can then be compared. Émilie's begins boldly: "Eh bien! Vous voulez absolument que je vous dise en quoi je me donne les airs de blâmer l'éducation qu'on nous donne? Le voici: [...]" (1:148)), and her positions could not be more clearly stated – she even refers to them as "mon petit système" (1:149) and enumerates her points, including, "I° J'ai remarqué que nous nous instruisons plus par l'exemple que par toutes les leçons que nous recevons" (1:148-149). In other words, actions (or "examples") speak louder than words, and here we see the capital importance of learning by examples in d'Épinay's method; as in Grimm's method, it is literally the cornerstone of her program, point number one. The notion of exemplarity will be central to Émilie's method for educating her daughter, and indeed, is central to d'Épinay's method for educating *Montbrillant's* readers, because almost every character is a type of example. Unfortunately, Émilie goes on to explain, the worst sin of contemporary educational practice is hypocrisy, or deed undermining word ("la conduite de nos supérieurs est souvent fautive" (1: 149)), in other words, a bad example. This is especially true when it comes to teaching young women about attracting male attention. Girls are held accountable for attracting men's eyes – and are made to feel shame for doing so – but at the same time, the adults in their lives tacitly condone catching men's eyes and teach them to do so: "[o]n nous fait un crime de donner notre cœur et l'on n'est occupé qu'à nous inspirer l'art de plaire" (1:149), perhaps because catching the right glance might lead to marriage.



In contrast to the dysfunctional model of education currently in place, *Émilie* proposes a system that would channel the power of examples to teach in a new way, and in which critical thinking, analysis of observed conduct, and transparency would replace blind adherence to platitudes that reinforce girls' punishing bind. She wants to "profiter d[u] penchant imitatif des enfans pour les former," and, instead of hiding her mistakes and flaws from children, she would admit them to them, and would teach the children to notice them. "Je leur montrerais un grand désir de m'en corriger. Je les prierais de m'avertir de ceux qu'ils découvriraient en moi," writes *Émilie*. Through her example, *Émilie* would gain the children's confidence – and the right to correct them the same way they correct her, without them rebelling. She thinks that they would not develop mistrust or try to hide things from her (1:149). Thus, children should be taught to compare what people say with what they do, and they should feel comfortable questioning authority in this quest for truth and personal improvement. Readers, in turn, should consider the examples provided by d'Épinay's characters, examining their flaws and strengths and emulating their good qualities. One of the most important good qualities that d'Émilie's system promotes is sincerity: children are taught to examine their own and others' behavior, to speak truth to power, and to pay little heed to appearances. They learn to speak sincerely and to identify others' sincere and hypocritical speech. Additionally, adults would be held accountable for the kind of example they provide. Thus, a kind of quality control is built into this form of education.

*Émilie*'s cousin's response to this letter is hardly encouraging and effectively dismisses *Émilie*'s ideas as unrealistic: "Voilà que je me meurs d'impatience de vous voir mariée, et une demi-douzaine d'enfans autour de vous, leur faisant tout à tour votre confession générale, et les marmousets vous mettant en pénitence; car vous exigerez sans doute qu'ils vous en imposent?" (1:151) Mme de Sally's is but the first of many naysayer voices *Émilie* will have to confront in

her struggle to convince others of the soundness of her methods.<sup>3</sup> The rest of *Montbrillant* will effectively prove these voices wrong. The letter to Mme de Sally is an important structural element in the novel, in that it provides the reader with Émilie's youthful impressions and plans for educating her own children, which will then be compared with her later experience. Although in the letter, she for the most part confidently asserts the value of her system, and will continue to do so throughout the text, Émilie is only acting on her own instinct and observation. In this early passage written before she has children of her own, she leaves open the possibility that she may be wrong and defers to others with more wisdom and authority: "[p]eut-être avec plus d'expérience changerai-je d'avis? C'est pourquoi je prends le parti de me laisser conduire" (1:150). Over the course of the story, Émilie and readers will answer the question of whether or not she was right to condemn modern educational methods. The answer, of course, is yes, she was correct, and Émilie's experience only solidifies her convictions. Not only will the rest of *Montbrillant* show her why it is necessary to move away from the hypocrisy her elders have shown in educating her, but it will also show the alternative in Émilie's development as an educator in her own right.

As a young person, Émilie is subjected to some of society's favored models of education. As a girl without financial resources, the academic parts of her education are generally neglected while her relatives stress the importance of learning to please others. In adolescence, she spends three years in a convent, and comes out just as educated as when she went in. When she initially tries to educate her son, her family forces her to follow society's mandates for what the education of a young boy from his social class should be, namely that he should live at a *collège* where he would take some classes, and work alongside his personal *précepteur*. *Montbrillant*

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<sup>3</sup> It is also an example of d'Épinay's self-deprecating humor.

shows the flaws in society's methods – as represented by the views, notably, of Émilie's mother and husband. Because Émilie is only acting on her own instinct and observation and does not possess the necessary authority to be taken seriously, and perhaps because she doubts herself to some extent, she seeks advice and support for her different views from the male intellectuals around her, especially M. Desbarres and M. René. Although her family's views have the weight of society and tradition behind them and Desbarres and René are recognized as great intellectual men, after systematically considering each of their methods and showing the results of some of them, because of their shortcomings and the superiority of her own methods, Émilie returns to her own convictions. In the end, her educational program for her daughter Pauline is remarkably close to what she advocates in this early letter to her cousin. But because Émilie does not have the necessary authority, her intervening systematic exploration and rejection of other methods as negative examples is a necessary corollary to her demonstration of the effectiveness of Pauline's education.

Some readers wonder what to make of passages like the one in which d'Épinay details, for over one hundred pages, how Émilie's brother-in-law, M. de Grangé, repeatedly propositions her. The passage may seem like a digression until readers consider d'Épinay's educational motives. It turns out that M. de Grangé has promised to help Émilie gain control of her children's education and to help her financially. Specifically, he promises to influence Émilie's father-in-law, who does not have long to live, so that he will change his will to include a financial provision guaranteeing Émilie and her mother an income that is protected from M. de Montbrillant and so that he will also state in the will that Émilie is the parent who should be authorized to make decisions on behalf of the children concerning their education. However, M. de Grangé makes these promises on the condition that Émilie have sex with him. Desbarres, to

whom Émilie turns for guidance, encourages her to sleep with Grangé in order to guarantee her and her mother's financial security and to achieve her educational aims. Appalled at M. de Grangé's propositions and Desbarres' advice, Émilie resists, but meets her goals nonetheless, in part because Grangé helps her anyway. This episode shows *Montbrillant*'s women readers how they, too, can become "maîtresse de [leurs] enfans et de leur éducation" while keeping their morals intact.<sup>4</sup> It is a delicate situation that they must negotiate with the greatest care, as the hundred-odd pages on the subject in *Montbrillant* show.

The Grangé episode serves another purpose as well. When Émilie reluctantly agrees to bow to her husband's desire to hire a *précepteur* for their son, she does not know how to go about choosing one. Grangé mentions that he knows a good *précepteur*, a M. Balbi. Émilie's mother warns that hiring Balbi would mean that Grangé would then have a spy installed in Émilie's house for the next several years, which would be dangerous considering Grangé's penchant for trying to coerce Émilie into sex. Thus, Grangé is the pretext for another lesson for women readers, who must carefully consider the personal ties of the tutors they hire for their children, and what it would mean to bring them into their homes. The episode shows readers that hiring a tutor can become yet another of the many occasions for a woman to become ensnared in a situation of dependence in which she is robbed of her freedom to dictate what happens to her own body. Balbi, incidentally, is hired, and turns out to be much less of a capable educator than desired, which in turn provides a pretext for Émilie to observe how much more parents are devoted to their children's education than are strangers, and for readers to reconsider how a tutor, if one must be hired, should be chosen. The outcome with Balbi demonstrates that it is better to choose one based on their passion and skill for teaching rather than the personal recommendation

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<sup>4</sup> *Montbrillant*, 2:251.

of a philandering brother-in-law simply because one does not know any other way of finding a *précepteur*.

D'Épinay lets readers know that they should consider Émilie's experiences as an example. The one moment, besides the second preface, that Émilie addresses her women readers directly comes after an exclamation point-laden litany of her personal failings, including, among others, "la confiance et l'estime de mon ami perdus" and "l'éducation de mes enfans négligée." At the end of the list, we read, "Ô femmes! puissiez-vous apprendre par mon exemple qu'une pitié mal entendue est la plus cruelle et la plus dangereuse de toutes les faiblesses!" (2:597) The notion of the characters serving as examples is key to understanding *Montbrillant*, as the contrast between positive and negative examples in large part explains the work's structure. In this case, Émilie serves as a negative example, although elsewhere she serves as a model to emulate, especially later in the novel, because the work shows her development toward an ideal.

*Montbrillant* is organized chronologically, and at first glance, the novel seems simply to tell the life story of Émilie. But upon closer inspection, the work reveals a complex structure, in which d'Épinay relies on a series of contrasts to make her educational points. There are two main educational processes in *Montbrillant* that also serve to structure the novel: in the first, the reader witnesses Émilie's weak, inadequate education, which contrasts with the idealized, prescriptive education Émilie develops for her daughter Pauline in the second. It is important to note that Émilie's own education continues into adulthood and that, through sustained effort, she does eventually succeed in making up for the damage done to her as a young person by a bad education. In addition to her own educational experiences, another key to developing her curriculum for her daughter is Émilie's experience of romantic relationships – the first two with unworthy men, and the third, Émilie's relationship with Volx, based on sincerity, in which

Émilie finally finds the right model for Pauline's marriage. Émilie's bad marriage and unhappy first love affair with Formeuse provide a strong contrast to her eventual idealized relationship with Volx, a contrast that underscores the importance of women educating their daughters in the way that Émilie educates Pauline. In addition to Émilie's and Pauline's educations, there is the education of Émilie's son. Undertaken according to Émilie's husband's educational notions with the "help" of their useless preceptor, Balbi, it stands in sharp contrast to Pauline's education. This counterexample thus provides further justification for d'Épinay's unconventional educational ideas.<sup>5</sup> We see another series of contrasts in the three points in the novel when a "rule" is given – a prescriptive schedule that accounts for how a pupil should spend every minute of their day. The first comes from a corrupt priest who is trying to abuse Émilie's adolescent devotion in order to gain control of her family and their money, the second comes from Émilie's son's *précepteur*, and Émilie makes up the third based on the idealized educational principles she has developed. We find another series of contrasts in the string of educators or men with ideas on education that Émilie consults, ultimately rejecting their proposals in favor of her own.

The novel shows the superiority of Émilie's educational methods in several ways, including the direct juxtaposition of her own ad hoc and largely unsuccessful education with Pauline's good education, as well as a scene depicting a sort of *Jeopardy*-style contest that Émilie's husband stages between his son, educated by the *précepteur*, and his daughter, educated by Émilie. In this competition, the daughter wins, easily besting her older brother. We also see the superiority of Émilie's method in the way the two children turn out: when he is delivered back into Émilie's hands, the son has no empathy for others, no moral fiber, and has learned

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<sup>5</sup> For more on why they are unconventional, see, for example, Badinter, *Ambition*, 123.

virtually nothing, while the daughter has become an intelligent, caring, and compassionate individual as a result of Émilie's methods.

There are many contrasts between *Montbrillant*'s various educators as well. To name just a few, Émilie's mother contrasts unfavorably with M. de Lisieux and with Émilie in adulthood. Émilie is a better teacher than Balbi. Pauline's governess is a better educator than Balbi, too.

Critics reading the novel autobiographically wonder how d'Épinay, who lovingly dedicated *Les Lettres à mon fils* to her own mother in gratitude for educating her, could make her mother's analogue in *Montbrillant* into such an inadequate educator. Reading Émilie and her mother as contrasting examples rather than faithful portraits of d'Épinay and her actual mother may explain this authorial choice. Scholars have tried to explain some of d'Épinay's other choices in *Montbrillant*, such as rolling her two daughters into one character, as strategies to cover up the illegitimate births of certain of her children.<sup>6</sup> The educational impetus behind *Montbrillant* offers additional possible explanations. D'Épinay did not need an additional daughter to make her educational points. Instead of hiding an illegitimate birth, we might think d'Épinay gave Émilie only one daughter the better to illustrate her points. She needed two children only – one who received a bad education and one who received a good education. Also, she needed a boy, who could, in theory, expect to receive what little money the family had,<sup>7</sup> and a girl, who would receive nothing and who would therefore have to perfect herself in order to achieve the goal of marriage. Traditionally, a boy would receive an education outside of the home as a matter of course, and a girl would perhaps spend some time in a convent, but her education would be largely ad hoc. Having a child of each gender would allow d'Épinay to

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<sup>6</sup> See Badinter, *Ambition* for an extended discussion, for example.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, Émilie's son does not actually receive any money, because his father ruins the family. Instead, he is sent abroad to train for a commerce career.

explore the shortcomings in the conventional education of both. Giving Émilie only one son and one daughter may also be a sort of *homage* to Sévigné, and a conscious attempt to underline the similarities between her work and Sévigné's.

One of the most important models of the educational novel, for both d'Épinay and Grimm, was Fénelon's *Télémaque*, and the idea of symbolism is key to understanding that work (and other educational novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). The characters in *Montbrillant* can, for the most part, be read as symbolic *clefs* that reveal truths about various educational positions. Though most characters are three-dimensional and much more highly developed than, say, those we will find in the didactic stories included in *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, they are still types in the sense that each is used to make a point. Some characters even have symbolic names that signal to the reader exactly which type they are, such as M. and Mme Constant. As we might expect, the Constants are a loving couple, devoted to each other. They have four children and are poor, but are conscientious workers and trustworthy. Their name sums up several of these characteristics. M. de Montbrillant, a corrupt *fermier général*, arranges for them to starve so he can force the wife to sleep with him through promises of payment, on which he does not make good until Émilie makes him do so through her interventions with his superiors in the *ferme générale*. The Constants so clearly being types makes clear to readers that this episode is a fable pitting absolute good and innocence against corruption incarnate.

Deciphering the meaning of other *clefs* requires thinking about the role the characters play in the protagonist Émilie's quest to obtain an education and to devise the best method of education for her own children.

Another sign that the characters are types is that each is caricatured to a certain extent. Émilie's great aunt, the Marquise de Beaufort, for example, represents the view that nobles have



inborn superiority over others and believes that Émilie, a poor noble, should receive an education that will expressly develop her noble qualities. It is a view that the novel basically promotes, with some caveats, but Mme de Beaufort's position is so extreme that other characters make fun of her for it, which suggests that Beaufort, who is elderly, holds an outdated, unrealistic view that has not kept pace with changes in society that have made money in many cases more important than genealogy. She cannot, therefore, understand much of what Émilie experiences and the choices she makes.

Among the people to have furnished inspiration for d'Épinay's characters, Rousseau, the writer Duclos, her son's teacher Linant, and her one-time friend Mlle d'Ette find themselves transformed into figures who embody an educational philosophy the author finds lacking. For example, Mlle Darcy, inspired by Mlle d'Ette, serves as the model for a teacher doling out a libertine education that at first seems to free Émilie from the religious values that have been instilled in her but that ultimately is not compatible with Émilie's authentic self and leads her to consider suicide. In many cases, it seems like d'Épinay not only rejects the ideas of each character, but also personally discredits them. For example, the treachery of Mlle Darcy, supposedly Émilie's best friend, is exposed when Darcy steals Émilie's lover Formeuse. Why would d'Épinay discredit them, if the characters are simply meant to be vehicles for ideas? It is because it always involves showing that these characters are insincere, which is another way to discredit their educational ideas, because sincerity is the main thrust of d'Épinay's program.

According to this logic, there is a character inspired by Rousseau to whom d'Épinay devotes one-sixth of the novel not because she wants to destroy Rousseau's reputation for posterity or to vent bitterness about their quarrel. Rather, d'Épinay included M. René in order to make him hold educational views that she disagreed with (at that time), chief among them that

parents were unfit to educate their own children and that education in a general sense was impossible. Pierre Tyl states that the true scandal of *Montbrillant* lies not in its revelations about real people who actually lived; it lies, rather, in the fact that d'Épinay caricatured some of her contemporaries' views in order to show the superiority of her own ideas: “[C]es personnages ne sont pas de simples caricatures; l’auteur a su les faire vivre non sans une certaine souplesse, n’hésitant pas, par exemple, à faire de René son porte-parole” (78).

It is clear that d'Épinay makes the Rousseau-like character a vehicle for a vision of education diametrically opposed to that which she supports and has embodied in *Émilie*. In a letter to M. Volx, *Émilie* states that René likes being contrary and supporting bizarre views simply because no one else does and because he derives pleasure from it, not because he sincerely holds those views. She then describes a shocking conversation she has had with him on the subject of parents educating their children, which left “dans mon âme vraiment de la désolation.” René tells *Émilie* that “les pères et mères ne sont point faits par la nature pour élever, ni les enfans pour l’être.” *Émilie* describes how René admits to having “un projet d’éducation dans la tête” for parents who are counting on him to educate their children, even though he has just admitted he does not think that education is possible – another indicator of his insincerity.

René explains that in the state of nature, a person’s needs – food, self-defense, and sex – teach them everything they need to know: “Ainsi vous voyez que l’éducation d’un homme sauvage se fait sans qu’on s’en mêle; que la base de la nôtre n’est pas dans la nature; il faut qu’elle soit fondée sur des conventions de société, qui sont toutes pour la plupart bizarres, contradictoires, incompatibles tantôt avec le goût, les qualités de l’enfant, tantôt avec les vues, l’intérêt, l’état du père, que sais-je? etc., etc.” *Émilie* objects that since they are not “sauvages,”

“[b]ien ou mal, il faut élever” and wants to know the best method anyway. René believes that the first step would be to “refondre toute la société,” because otherwise, all you will do is to tell your child “une foule de maximes fort sages” that will not help him advance in the world in the least, because all the successful people break those rules, since society as it is set up requires a person to be false, a liar. Parents are not able to keep from letting on that these are the qualities that are truly necessary for success. If a child really presses his father about “l’observance rigoureuse des règles” in all circumstances, that father will not be able to keep from adding “tant de *si*, de *mais*, tant de modifications à ses préceptes, que l’enfant ne saura plus où s’arrêter, et la belle maxime se réduit à rien.” Moral education will continue to be futile until such time as “l’intérêt particulier ne sera pas tellement joint à l’intérêt général qu’il soit presque impossible d’être vicieux sans être châtié, et vertueux sans être récompensé, ce qui n’est malheureusement dans aucun lieu du monde.” René thinks that the situation is perhaps a bit better in Geneva, but that all the same, education is useless and only teaches things that must be forgotten later on. Émilie wants to know if there is any advantage to being good, even in a corrupt society; René says yes, but that it is an advantage one feels only on one’s deathbed.

Throughout their conversation, d’Épinay repeats that René speaks with “le même sens froid” (3:136) – another sign of his insincerity – but she stresses that Émilie is deeply affected by what she hears – a sign of her sincerity, on the other hand. She is “vraiment en colère,” René’s *propos*, she says, “me pétrifia dans la bouche,” and afterward, she remains “vivement affectée de cette conversation.” She cannot bring herself to abandon the idea “qu’il faut renoncer à la probité pour être heureux dans ce monde” (3:135-137).

Nor, it seems, can she jettison the idea of a mother teaching her own children effectively. Though this conversation with René appears only once the third volume is well underway, we

might think that the disturbing questions it raises for a proponent of educating one's own children might indeed be the motor driving the work, as d'Épinay uses the entire novel to attempt to illustrate the righteousness of her position. For René, parents are too self-interested to educate their children to be truly selfless. For Émilie, on the other hand, no one but parents are interested enough in the child to teach well.

Elsewhere, Émilie muses that schools are like hospitals designed to treat the poor, because no one in charge has the child's best interests at heart:

que ceux qui n'ont ni parens ni amis, et que l'indigence prive de tous secours, aillent dans ces hôpitaux chercher des remèdes contre les maux dont ils sont accablés. Mais que dirait-on d'un homme qui, avec les moyens que fournit sa maison, s'arracherait du sein de ses proches et des bras de ses amis, pour aller profiter des soins mercenaires et imparfaits d'un étranger commis pour cet effet? (2:53)

Balbi is the perfect illustration of this idea: he shows that he is wholly uninterested in teaching Émilie's son while they live at the school together. D'Épinay argues that "les malades abandonnés dans les hôpitaux" in fact have one advantage over children in school: the doctor takes the patient's temperament into account and treats him accordingly. At school, however, "on ne peut se conduire que par un certain nombre de maximes générales, quelquefois vraies, souvent fausses, qu'on applique à tous les enfans indifféremment, sans avoir égard ni à leurs inclinations ni à leur caractère, qu'il est impossible de développer ni de connaître en particulier" (2:53-54). Students can never learn, Émilie asserts, as long as their individual needs are not being met, and a school can never prepare children for the many different estates to which they are destined. The solution would seem to be, then, that each child should have his very own tutor, à la *Émile*, but parents would naturally show more care in teaching than a stranger hired for this purpose:

Il faudrait donc auprès de chaque enfant un homme exprès, chargé uniquement de l'étude de son caractère et des moyens les plus propres à le former? Quels hommes il faudrait pour cette étude! Et s'ils étaient trouvés, alors de l'éducation publique vous en feriez une particulière, avec la différence qui subsistera toujours entre les soins inspirés par les

sentimens naturels, et ceux qui sont dictés par le devoir d'un état qu'on a embrassé.  
(2:54)

D'Épinay shows the superiority of a mother educating her own daughter over this paradigm. Émilie has a great deal of contact with her daughter, dictates what her governess must do to teach her during the hours when Émilie cannot be with her, and displays a thoughtful, caring attitude toward her daughter's education throughout the story. The contrast in her son's and her daughter's moral development illustrates that Émilie is right and René is wrong.

In his works, Rousseau does not say that parents cannot educate their own children. *Émile* ends with the eponymous character saying that he will teach his own son. Rousseau does not, however, believe that a child's mother should be the one to do it, if that child is a boy. In his epistolary novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, his heroine states that her mission ends with breastfeeding her sons and preparing them to be educated by others: "Je nourris des enfants et n'ai pas la présomption de vouloir former les hommes. J'espère, dit-elle en regardant son mari, que de plus dignes mains se chargeront de ce noble emploi. Je suis femme et mère, je sais me tenir à mon rang. Encore une fois, la fonction dont je suis chargée n'est pas d'élever mes fils, mais de les préparer pour être élevés."<sup>8</sup>

Based on Émilie's descriptions of herself writing a novel that is better than her friend René's, Mary Trouille makes the case that *Montbrillant* was a response to – and attempt to rival – Rousseau's *Julie*, published in 1761 (*Sexual Politics*, 95-161). Trouille cites passages like one in which Émilie's lover Volx compliments the notebooks she has filled so far with a draft of her own novel and encourages her to keep writing by saying that if she keeps going, she will surely

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<sup>8</sup> For *Émile*, see Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gagnebin and others, 5 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1969; 4:867. *ARTFL*. For *Julie*, see Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, ed. by Henri Coulet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 2:205 (Vème partie, lettre III); d'Épinay, *Lettres à mon fils*, ed. by Weinreb, 15.

produce a work of genius (“un ouvrage unique,” “un chef-d’œuvre,” “un monument,” “digne d’une femme de génie”) and that he would only recommend changing a word here and there.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Volx warns Émilie not to show her draft to René: “Il a le tact trop fin pour ne pas sentir l’extrême distance qu’il y a entre votre Sophie et son ennuyeuse et pédantesque héroïne” (3:171-172; cited in *Sexual Politics*, 105).<sup>10</sup> In such passages,<sup>11</sup> Trouille sees “an aspect of their relationship that has largely been neglected by Rousseau and by d’Épinay specialists alike: how the personal and literary rivalry between them served as a key motivating force and creative impetus behind some of their most important works” (102). Trouille also cites the parallels between Volx staying up all night reading Émilie’s draft and Rousseau’s account of Mme de Talmont reading *Julie*, as well as the contrast between Rousseau’s labored writing style and Émilie’s “natural” style (106).<sup>12</sup>

I believe Trouille is correct in saying that there was a literary rivalry between d’Épinay and Rousseau, although it is difficult to judge exclusively from passages from *Montbrillant*, since it is a fictionalized account. More compelling evidence comes from reading *Julie* and

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note the language Volx uses in the passage. Phrases like “ouvrage unique” and “femme de génie” seem to be an echo of Grimm’s comment that if he had succeeded in writing the sort of idealized educational novel he imagined, it would have been more of an “ouvrage de génie” than Rousseau’s *Émile*. This is further evidence that *Montbrillant* was conceived of as an educational novel.

<sup>10</sup> Roth discusses the idea that this passage seems to indicate that d’Épinay started writing *Montbrillant* only in 1757 and as a rival to *Julie* (3: 172). A couple of different possibilities suggest themselves. One, that while d’Épinay had worked out the ideas in *Montbrillant* earlier, she began writing when inspired to compete with *Julie*. Two, d’Épinay had already started writing an educational novel earlier and changed and added parts in response to *Julie*. We must remember that *Montbrillant* is a fictional account and that Roth himself often reproaches d’Épinay for changing dates.

<sup>11</sup> Other passages that Trouille analyzes in this light include *Montbrillant*, 3:118 (see *Sexual Politics*, 104), *Montbrillant*, 3:131 (see *SP*, 104, 340-341n15), *Montbrillant*, 3:100 (see *SP*, 102-104), *Montbrillant*, 3:131 (see *SP*, 104-105), *Montbrillant*, 3:171-172 (see *SP*, 105), *Montbrillant*, 3:171 (see *SP*, 106), and *Montbrillant*, 3:196 (see *SP*, 106).

<sup>12</sup> The latter brings to mind the qualities of *Montbrillant*’s letters that were highlighted in one of the prefaces.

Émilie, if not as allegories, then at least as vehicles for ideas, like many of the characters in *Montbrillant*. Émilie, like Julie, can be read as an allegory of sensibility and virtue.<sup>13</sup> If we think of both novels as *romans à these* or *romans d'idées* on the subject of how a sensitive individual copes with a conflict between their inner desires – their “authentic” self – and the moral conduct imposed on them by society, we see many parallels. Among their many other similarities, both works feature a retreat at the end: in *Julie*, to an idyllic landscape in which every aspect has been engineered; *Montbrillant*'s Émilie retreats to the society of a chosen circle of trusted associates. Both works feature long discussions of the *mœurs* in Geneva (virtuous) versus those in Paris (corrupt) well into each story. Among the differences between the works, on the other hand, Julie falls in love with her tutor, whereas Émilie de Montbrillant has a romantically disinterested tutor but still, like Julie, experiences a violent sexual passion, when she falls in love with her cousin. At first, Montbrillant seems to feel the same, although, unlike Saint-Preux, he is not sincere. Whereas Julie and Wolmar live out an idealized version of marriage, d'Épinay presents a much more realistic – and pessimistic – vision of marriage. Whereas *Julie* deals with education, and is considered a *roman pédagogique*,<sup>14</sup> *Montbrillant* deals with education in what, to many readers, might have seemed a more practical way. Rather than simply presenting readers with the education of an exemplary individual and some ideas on the education of her children, *Montbrillant* presents sustained reflections on how mothers can integrate their children's education into their daily routines, with examples. (Both works, however, share an emphasis on educating the heart.) If *Julie* inspired her, d'Épinay picks up on that work's educational impetus and pushes it much farther in *Montbrillant*. Most importantly, whereas Julie says she knows her

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<sup>13</sup> I was inspired to read Julie this way by De Man's *Allegories of Reading* and McAlpin's *Gender, Authenticity, and the Missive Letter*.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Grandroute presents *Julie* as the culmination of several currents and developments in the educational novel in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See 2:901-972.

place, and it is not to educate her own children, Émilie's greatest desire – and greater than any romantic passion – is to educate her own children, and it is one of the ways she is counter-cultural.

As a *roman pédagogique* that argues against many popular educational ideas of the eighteenth century, *Montbrillant* above all debunks the notion that education should be left to schools, convents, and *précepteurs*. Instead, d'Épinay proposes that a mother could be the ideal educator for her children, presents a curriculum mothers could feasibly implement, and demonstrates how it would be far superior to concurrent models of education in fostering a child's moral and intellectual development. Émilie rejected the views of René and d'Épinay disagreed with Rousseau's views on women's education and the suitability of mothers to teach their children. However, d'Épinay drew inspiration from another authority on education who provided a counterpoint to Rousseau, the great seventeenth-century *épistolière* Madame de Sévigné (1626-1696), whose experiences showed that a mother could teach her daughter successfully.



## Chapter Five: Mothers as Educators: The Example of Sévigné

Many eighteenth-century readers of Sévigné were interested in her religious views, her maternal sensibilities, and her style, as Catherine Montfort has shown.<sup>1</sup> In a century preoccupied with finding the right method of education, Sévigné, who filled many pages of her letters to her daughter with advice concerning the instruction of her youngest granddaughter Pauline,<sup>2</sup> also appealed to readers thinking about how best to educate children. Indeed, Sévigné was seen as a model of a mother who taught her children by example.<sup>3</sup> Even so, when Sévigné is mentioned in conjunction with education, it is usually in the context of women learning how to write elegant, feminine letters, a fact unsurprising, given that by the 1750s, Sévigné's letters had become the model for women's epistolary practice in France.<sup>4</sup> Sévigné, however, had a wider impact than is generally acknowledged on eighteenth-century theories of education, especially the education of women.

In Sévigné's instructions to her daughter Françoise-Marguerite de Grignan concerning her granddaughter Pauline's education, d'Épinay found a model – and, moreover, a real-life historical example – showing how a mother could educate her own daughter at home and make her into a strong critical thinker through reading, writing, and conversation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Montfort Howard, *Fortunes de Madame de Sévigné*, 50.

<sup>2</sup> Pauline de Simiane (*née* de Grignan), 1674-1737, daughter of Françoise-Marguerite de Grignan.

<sup>3</sup> Montfort Howard, *Fortunes*, 83-84.

<sup>4</sup> Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 65, 148-50; Dow, "Women Readers in Europe: Readers, Writers, Salonnières, 1750-1900," 7.

<sup>5</sup> D'Épinay also had thoughts on boys' education, but in this chapter, the education of girls is the principal matter.

In the 1750s, Sévigné was well known and admired among d'Épinay's circle of literary collaborators.<sup>6</sup> The editions of Sévigné's letters published in the eighteenth century contain fewer letters than modern editions. Sévigné's ideas for Pauline's education are missing from the earliest publications, from 1696-1697, of her letters to Bussy and are virtually absent from the letters to her daughter included in the 1720s editions.<sup>7</sup> However, much of the material on Pauline's upbringing was included in the expanded, six-volume edition edited by Denis-Marius Perrin, the official version approved by Pauline herself, published in 1734-1737.<sup>8</sup> In 1754, Perrin published another edition with two additional volumes of letters, making for a total of eight volumes and 772 letters available to readers when d'Épinay was writing *Montbrillant* in 1756.<sup>9</sup> A review by Grimm in the 15 June 1754 issue of the *Correspondance littéraire* notes that the new edition of Sévigné is "très correcte et beaucoup mieux arrangée que la précédente" and says of its author:

Il serait inutile de vous parler de cette illustre et charmante femme qui dans l'heureux séjour des ombres fait l'admiration et les délices de Socrate, de Platon, de Cicéron, de Lélius, de Plutarque, de Montagne, d'Addison, de Pope, de tous les honnêtes gens de cette trempe dont elle est entourée.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The *Encyclopédistes* changed their opinion later in the century. See Montfort Howard, *Fortunes*, 72-86.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Bussy-Rabutin, *Les Lettres de Messire Roger de Rabutin comte de Bussy, lieutenant général des armées du Roi, et mestre de camp général de la cavalerie française et étrangère* (1697); Sévigné, *Lettres de Madame Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné, à Madame la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille* (1726). (For other editions, see Montfort Howard, *Fortunes*, 98-99.)

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Sévigné, *Recueil des lettres de Madame la marquise de Sévigné à Madame la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille*, 6 vols (Paris: N. Simart, 1734 (vols 1-4) and Leyden: Verbeek, 1738 (vols 5-6). Courtesy Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library.

<sup>9</sup> Duchêne, "Note sur le texte," in Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 1:769.

<sup>10</sup> Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, ed. by Kölving, 1:218.

D'Épinay's first contributions to the *Correspondance littéraire* appeared in 1756.<sup>11</sup> At the time d'Épinay was writing *Montbrillant*, it is likely that she shared the admiration Grimm felt for Sévigné and that she was familiar with the 1754 Perrin edition. For this reason, unless otherwise noted, references to Sévigné in the remainder of the chapter will come from this edition,<sup>12</sup> although, with some exceptions, the ideas and passages referenced appear in the Perrin edition published in 1734-1737, approximately 20 years before the writing of *Montbrillant*.

Sévigné's influence on d'Épinay has been hidden for the last two hundred years because most scholars have assumed that d'Épinay borrowed the majority of her educational principles from Rousseau and other male contemporaries.<sup>13</sup> D'Épinay did indeed exchange ideas about education with her contemporaries and an initial reading of *Montbrillant* would seem to suggest Rousseau and John Locke as defining influences, as, like them,<sup>14</sup> d'Épinay is interested in how to develop a systematic plan of education adapted to a particular child's needs.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Rousseau is caricatured in René, and Locke is included in a list of authors read by Émilie<sup>16</sup> – an

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<sup>11</sup> Kølving, "La Présence de Madame d'Épinay dans la *Correspondance littéraire*" 210, 215.

<sup>12</sup> Sévigné, *Recueil des lettres de Madame la marquise de Sévigné à Madame la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille*, 8 vols (Paris: Rollin, 1754).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Paul-Armand Challemeil-Lacour, "Introduction," in Louise d'Épinay, *Œuvres*, ed. by Paul-Armand Challemeil-Lacour, I: xvii-xviii; Weinreb, *Eagle*, 35-36; Badinter, *Ambition*, 191, 221-23. Badinter names Grimm, Diderot, and Duclos as additional influences, and there are indeed interesting intertexts to explore between their works. Another intertext to examine would be that between d'Épinay and Condillac on the subject of sensationalism.

<sup>14</sup> Long before *Émile*, in his 1740 *Mémoire présenté à M. de Mably*, Rousseau mentions that he has spent time studying the characters of the children he is going to teach. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Mémoire présenté à M. de Mably sur l'éducation de M. son fils*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Raymond Trousson and Frédéric S. Eigeldinger, 24 vols (Geneva: Éditions Slatkine, 2012), VII (2012), 15-45 (15, 18). Like Rousseau after him, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693, published in French in 1695), John Locke stressed that his method was designed for a child with a particular temperament and would not be effective for another child, and indeed, might even harm him. See John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see 1:4 and 2:50.

<sup>16</sup> 2:508.

educator – and it appears that he was another key influence, as d'Épinay adopted several aspects of his thought, including the de-emphasis on dead languages and the idea that children should learn from examples.<sup>17</sup>

While it is clear that d'Épinay was inspired in part by Rousseau, Locke, and other male authors, their influence is not as totalizing as it first appears. Locke suggests that the differences in the education of boys and of girls should be comparatively small, but the model he ultimately presents is of a boy's education.<sup>18</sup> Rousseau had little to offer girls in the way of intellectual development, and for him, the ideal teacher is not a child's own mother.<sup>19</sup> Ruth Weinreb has argued that in *Les Lettres à mon fils*, d'Épinay presents her own ideas about education and disagrees with Rousseau on several pivotal issues.<sup>20</sup> *Montbrillant* follows this pattern. Though male authors offered models of education adapted to a particular (male) child's needs, d'Épinay shows that girls had different educational needs. In a society in which the lives of upper-class women were defined and circumscribed by their marriages, girls who would not have a dowry would need to find some other way to attract a husband or else they would likely end up in a convent, and women could easily become trapped in unhappy unions with no possibility of divorce. D'Épinay saw the need for an educational program that would prepare girls to overcome these challenges. Unlike Locke and Rousseau, Sévigné provided a detailed account of how a mother could implement a curriculum to match her daughter's needs.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts*, ed. by Yolton and Yolton, 143, 225-26, 243-44, among others. *Montbrillant*, 2:308-09; 3:32, among others.

<sup>18</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts*, ed. by Yolton and Yolton, 86.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, ed. by Henri Coulet, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 2:205 (Vème partie, lettre III); d'Épinay, *Lettres à mon fils*, ed. by Weinreb, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Weinreb, "Introduction," in d'Épinay, *Lettres à mon fils*, ed. by Weinreb, 13-17.

<sup>21</sup> Sévigné and d'Épinay were not the only early modern women thinking about how best to educate women. Besides Leprince de Beaumont, the ideas of Madame de Maintenon (1635-

Uncovering Sévigné's influence on *Montbrillant* requires reading d'Épinay's novel as a *roman à clef* in which the *clefs* refer to educational positions. In this case, Émilie's daughter is named Pauline. Pauline was also the given name of Sévigné's youngest granddaughter, Pauline de Simiane (*née* de Grignan), who spent part of her formative years learning from her mother at home. D'Épinay models Émilie's daughter's education on the one Pauline de Simiane received.

Pauline's education is a recurring theme of Sévigné's letters to her daughter Françoise-Marguerite de Grignan. François de Grignan, Pauline's father, was *lieutenant général* of Provence. He accrued many debts in the exercise of his state functions.<sup>22</sup> Because of the Grignans' financial situation, Pauline would not have an impressive dowry and it was therefore difficult for the family to arrange an advantageous match for her. The dowry required of women entering religious orders was much smaller than for those seeking to marry.<sup>23</sup> If Pauline spends time in a convent as a young woman, her grandmother suggests, she might be more likely to develop a vocation like her elder sister Marie-Blanche (4:483-484). Pauline did spend eight years in a convent during her formative years, returning to live with her mother at age fourteen.<sup>24</sup> Though it would undoubtedly be easier for the family – especially for financial reasons – if Pauline were to become a nun, Sévigné urges her daughter not to put Pauline back into a

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1719) bear some similarity to those of Sévigné and d'Épinay. All were concerned with how to marry off poor noble girls without dowries. Maintenon's solution, however, requires a school facility and teachers, whereas Sévigné and d'Épinay's alternative requires only a girl's own mother. In addition, Maintenon believed 'seven or eight books were sufficient' for girls' education, whereas Sévigné and d'Épinay promoted the idea that girls should read more widely. (See Montfort, "Madame de Sévigné et la lecture," 57.)

<sup>22</sup> See Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 1:310-311, 411-412, 688-689. (D'Épinay would not have seen this material in 1754.) See also Duchêne, *Madame de Sévigné, ou la chance d'être femme*, 210, 219.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Sévigné's granddaughter Marie-Blanche received 4000 *livres* when she took the veil and a pension of 100 *livres* per year. (Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 3:1282n2.) It is relatively little compared to Pauline's and Françoise-Marguerite's dowries.

<sup>24</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 3:1334n2.

convent, and frequently suggests ways that Françoise-Marguerite could educate Pauline herself, promising that Pauline's intelligence ("esprit"), cultivated through her education at home, "est sa dot" (6:48). In the end, Sévigné's prediction comes true, and Pauline succeeds in marrying a gentleman, the Marquis de Simiane, in spite of her financial difficulties. She did have a monetary dowry in addition to her intelligence, but it was relatively small, as Roger Duchêne notes: only "60 000 livres de dot dont 30 000 comptant alors que sa mère avait eu 300 000 livres comptant."<sup>25</sup>

The 1754 Perrin edition of Sévigné does not furnish as much information about the Grignans' finances as modern editions.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, in 1754 d'Épinay would have been able to read that Pauline's "esprit est sa dot" and that she married a gentleman.<sup>27</sup> Before cataloguing her many intellectual gifts and praising the strength of her character, a footnote in the 1754 edition mentions that Pauline married the Marquis de Simiane, thereby linking the fact of her marriage to her personal qualities.<sup>28</sup> The footnote is a reference added to a sentence of Sévigné's describing her granddaughter Pauline at the age of five: "Mais parlons de Pauline; l'aimable, la jolie petite créature!" (5:146-147). D'Épinay's Émilie uses almost exactly the same words to describe her daughter Pauline at the age of three: "Oh! mon tuteur, la jolie petite créature que Pauline!" (2:78). Thus, we can be fairly confident that d'Épinay read this particular page of Sévigné.

Perrin's footnote praises Pauline de Simiane's letters' "naturel" and "naïf" and states that she also excelled in other genres of writing (5:146-147). She possessed "au souverain degré le

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<sup>25</sup> Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 2:1545n3; 3:1676-77n1.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the 1754 edition does not include Sévigné's remark that in the Simianes, Pauline "a trouvé un homme et une famille qui comptent pour tout son mérite, sa personne et son nom, et rien du tout le bien" (Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 3:1135).

<sup>27</sup> "Son esprit est sa dot" is not included in the 1734-37 edition.

<sup>28</sup> This footnote is not included in the 1734-37 Perrin edition.

talent de bien parler” (5:147). She was not perfect, but she only had one small defect in her character, “un peu d’inégalité dans l’humeur,” and had many admirable qualities, among them “Une ame haute, généreuse, compatissante; un cœur droit, sensible, ami du vrai, formoit essentiellement son caractère” (5:148). The note stresses that although endowed with many natural advantages, Pauline’s education at the hands of her mother and grandmother was indispensable to the development of her gifts: “Il est aisé de juger quelle fut dans la suite une personne si favorisée de la nature, et élevée sous les yeux d’une mère et d’une grand’mère, dont l’esprit sembloit avoir passé dans le sien” (5:146). D’Épinay prizes Pauline de Simiane’s qualities and advocates strengthening them in women. Her character Pauline de Montbrillant, who, incidentally, lives with her mother and grandmother, develops her natural gifts and works to overcome her one or two minor defects at the hands of a mother who takes charge of her education.

The positive outcome of Pauline de Simiane’s marriage seems to have inspired d’Épinay, whose *Montbrillant* likewise demonstrates that qualities honed through educating a daughter at home can lead to marriage based more on personal attributes than on money. Émilie’s education is in many senses a failure due to her relatives’ neglect, and instead of marrying a nobleman of old aristocratic stock as her great-aunt had intended, she enters into an abusive marriage with her cousin, a wealthy *fermier général* whose liaisons and extravagant spending imperil their children’s reputations and financial futures, including her daughter’s marriage prospects. Émilie consequently prepares her son and daughter to succeed in life through their merits alone, telling her mother, “il faut qu’ils se croient sans autre ressource que celles qu’ils se procureront” (3:460).<sup>29</sup> She hopes that by dint of adequate self-development, her daughter will still be able to

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<sup>29</sup> See also 3:480.

marry well. The Marquise de Beaufort's project for Émilie thus becomes displaced onto Pauline. Drawing on an understanding of her failures, Émilie undertakes to educate Pauline differently. Upon learning that her family has lost their fortune, Émilie tells Pauline that though they may have to sell her treasured possessions, "[on] ne lui enlèverait pas au moins le peu de science qu'elle avait, ni la possibilité de travailler et de m'aider dans la peine où nous pourrions être" (2:626). Here, learning is more valuable than material wealth because it is not subject to the vicissitudes of fortune. The novel suggests that Pauline's personal qualities, cultivated through education, will allow her to succeed in marrying a gentleman, and Émilie hopes that it will make Pauline's relationship with her eventual husband an emotionally fulfilling union.

The novel ends with Émilie's death, and an epilogue informs readers that Pauline was in fact later able to marry a gentleman, and that like Pauline de Simiane, she did actually have a small dowry. Pauline de Montbrillant's was 100,000 *livres*, provided not by her family but by Émilie's tutor (3:557). While it would have been somewhat unrealistic for Pauline de Simiane or Émilie's daughter to marry a gentleman without any dowry whatsoever, Sévigné and d'Épinay devote hundreds of pages to the anxiety caused by the possibility of not having a dowry and both seek to create a kind of insurance policy in an education that would prepare a daughter to marry without one.

The name Pauline seems to have held great significance for d'Épinay, who uses it throughout her literary career, each time to designate a character who is remarkable for the intelligence and moral substance, developed through education, that allow her to marry in spite of her financial difficulties.

The name first appears in the 1750s in d'Épinay's notes for her initial novel project, *Madame de Rambures*, in which a character called Pauline, born to a widowed mother in



financial hardship, unremarkable in terms of looks but with strong moral values, was to have been able to marry in spite of the strikes against her.<sup>30</sup> This project eventually became *Montbrillant*, and although d'Épinay changed the structure and characters of the work substantially, Pauline remained and her story follows a similar arc.

Approximately twenty years later, when writing *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, d'Épinay used a character named Pauline de Perseuil in *La Mauvaise Fille*, one of *Conversations'* didactic stories.<sup>31</sup> In this story, Pauline, who spends all her time learning and attending to her moral education, is the foil for her cousin, Mlle d'Orville, the *mauvaise fille*. Both girls are educated at home, but while Mlle d'Orville misbehaves, Pauline uses every spare moment to learn, through reading, conversation, and other occupations (83). In the end, because of her “supériorité des talens et de la science” (87) Pauline gets married a year earlier than the *mauvaise fille*, and we never hear one word about her finances or her looks. Mlle d'Orville will soon be getting married, however – and “l'on ne doute pas qu'elle fasse un établissement avantageux” (87) – because after five years wasted, she has finally started to emulate Pauline in developing her character and intellect. Because of the similarity of their marriage outcomes and modes of learning, we may understand d'Épinay's repeated use of the name Pauline as a *clef* referring to Pauline de Simiane.

In addition to the figure of Pauline, there are three main themes in *Montbrillant* for which I argue that Sévigné served as a model and source of inspiration: first, the importance of educating one's daughters at home rather than warehousing them in a convent until they are old enough for marriage; second, the central place of reading, writing, and conversation in a

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<sup>30</sup> *Montbrillant*, 1:576-577. D'Épinay originally named the *Madame de Rambures* character Pauline, then changed the name to Adélaïde before returning to Pauline in *Montbrillant*. Although Mme de Rambures, Pauline's mother, was to have overcome her financial troubles through “habileté” (1:576), textual evidence also suggests that Pauline's merit was to have been responsible for the outcome of her marriage.

<sup>31</sup> See *Conversations*, 78-87.

daughter's curriculum; and third, the suggestion that the qualities developed through such an education could lead to harmonious marriage partnerships.

In the seventeenth century, it was common for aristocratic young women who did not plan to become nuns to spend some time during their formative years in a convent.<sup>32</sup> Sévigné put her daughter Françoise-Marguerite in a convent temporarily due to family circumstances and for educational reasons, not out of a desire to have her daughter out of the way. Indeed, Sévigné thinks this practice is “barbarie” and she could only stand to do it because she thought about how she would see Françoise-Marguerite often and how she would only be in the convent for a short time (4:55-56). When Françoise-Marguerite in turn debates putting her own daughter, Pauline, back into a convent, Sévigné protests. Having already lost her elder granddaughter, Marie-Blanche to a convent, Sévigné, is not eager to lose her younger granddaughter Pauline in the same way. Thus, Sévigné repeatedly implores her daughter to educate Pauline at home, rather than sending her back to the sisters. Indeed, she seems to have had to work hard to convince Françoise-Marguerite to take an interest in Pauline's education. In 1689, for example, Sévigné tells her that Pauline will not get a good education in a convent, in any subject. “Vous ferez bien mieux à Grignan, quand vous aurez le temps de vous appliquer,” Sévigné writes. “Vous lui ferez lire de bons livres, l'Abbadie même puisqu'elle a de l'esprit. Vous causerez avec elle. [...] Je suis persuadée que cela vaudra mieux qu'un couvent” (7:262-263).

Besides arguing that it would be feasible to educate Pauline at home by making her read and converse and that these activities would enrich her life much more than a convent education, Sévigné also believes that a convent would actually make Pauline stupid, and that keeping her at home would help preserve her natural, charming qualities (5:85, 146-149).

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<sup>32</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 235, 243.

These aspects of her character figure in another of the arguments in favour of keeping Pauline at home: Sévigné stresses to her daughter the pleasure (“plaisir”) she would gain by having Pauline by her side, because the young woman is loveable, pretty, and charming (“aimable,” “jolie”; 5:146, “charmante”; 5:148). She is intelligent with a good sense of humour, and Sévigné urges Françoise-Marguerite not to deprive herself of the joy of being with Pauline, whose company was moreover to be a consolation (“toutes ces petites consolations”; 5:199, “cette consolation”; 7:68) during times of financial stress and physical ailments.<sup>33</sup> In fact, when Françoise-Marguerite falls ill, Sévigné argues that having Pauline at home could serve a practical purpose: she could function as Françoise-Marguerite’s secretary,<sup>34</sup> an activity that would offer the added advantage of allowing Pauline to learn from her mother’s way of thinking and writing.

Sévigné’s arguments were not lost on d’Épinay, in whose time it remained common for young girls who were later to be married to spend at least a few months in a convent.<sup>35</sup> *Montbrillant*’s Émilie fights to have a say in her children’s education, resisting pressure from her family and society to leave their education to *précepteurs*, schools, or convents. Her husband wants to send her son away, and thinks that learning to play instruments and games are more important accomplishments than learning how to reason, an idea Émilie must combat. In addition, she has to resist the conventions of her social class. An aristocrat by birth and a member of the upper elite of the bourgeoisie through marriage, it would have been nearly unheard of for someone in Émilie’s position to educate her own children.<sup>36</sup> D’Épinay was very

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<sup>33</sup> On Pauline’s personality, see 5:515; 8:445-449. On the joy she brings, see 5:146-149. On Pauline’s help during difficult times, see 7:402.

<sup>34</sup> 7:425, 445-446.

<sup>35</sup> Rapley, *Social History*, 235, 243. Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Badinter, *Ambition féminine*, 123.

much alone among her contemporaries in promoting the path she lays out for Émilie.<sup>37</sup> She found in Sévigné an important proponent of education by women and for women, who provided a model of education that went against the common practice of shutting daughters away in a convent.

One reason Émilie wants to educate her children herself is that, like Sévigné, she believes she will do better educating them at home (2:53-55, 251). Émilie herself spent three years in a convent during her adolescence, a period of her life that *Montbrillant* entirely skips over, except for mentioning that she came out having learned nothing but having become ferociously *dévoté*. Émilie is so naïve that upon leaving the convent she immediately falls prey to a spiritual director who wants to abuse her confidence (1:52). Indeed, Cécile Cavallac has called attention to the comic aspects arising from Émilie's extreme naïveté,<sup>38</sup> and I would argue that they are meant to satirize the results of a typical convent education.

Another reason Émilie wants to educate her children, in particular her daughter, is that she enjoys their company (3:93). Émilie's daughter is endowed with "une intelligence singulière" (2:78), has a vivacious personality, and enjoys talking with her mother's friends (3:127). In many respects, Pauline de Montbrillant's personality resembles that of Pauline de Grignan.

Pauline de Montbrillant's appearances in d'Épinay's novel fill a similar role to Pauline de Grignan's in her grandmother's correspondence. Sévigné's mentions of Pauline serve as light-

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<sup>37</sup> A few other authors did advocate for mothers to serve as educators. See Nadine Bérenguier, *Conduct Books for Girls in Enlightenment France*, 65-77. Bérenguier suggests that d'Épinay "emulated" Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780) (8, 15), who held this view. However, the majority of mothers did not yet try to embody this ideal (72-73). On the educational responsibilities expected of mothers toward their daughters, see Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 75-84.

<sup>38</sup> Cavallac, "Ironie et sensibilité," 112-113.

hearted notes that punctuate discussions of serious matters like health problems and financial difficulties, and Sévigné often ends her letters by mentioning her granddaughter, asking for news about her, asking her daughter to kiss Pauline on her behalf, encouraging her mother to love her, or asking simply to be remembered to her.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, when Émilie de Montbrillant and her lover Volx are away from each other, they write to each other about health, money, and interpersonal problems involving people who are smearing Émilie's reputation, and their references to Pauline create a lighter counterpoint to these weighty matters. In one letter, Volx asks Émilie to remember him to her mother and give a hug to "les chers enfans, si la dignité de Mlle Pauline ne s'en trouve point offensée" (3:113-114). At the end of her reply, which details the distress caused by money woes, the necessity of dealing with unpleasant people, and her mood, which is "un peu distraite, un peu mélancolique," the last thing Émilie writes to Volx is

J'ai lu à Pauline l'article de votre lettre où vous parlez d'elle et de son frère, et où vous demandez permission de l'embrasser. Elle a regardé maman et lui a dit: "Je crois que nous pouvons le lui permettre. – Oui, a dit ma mère en riant, jusqu'à son retour seulement. – A la bonne heure, a répondu Pauline; et puis nous verrons." (3:118)

In these remarks, we see Pauline de Montbrillant's sense of humor, and we hear echoes of Sévigné's many injunctions not to forget "ma chère Pauline; préparez-la à m'aimer. Je vous conjure de la baiser tout à l'heure pour l'amour de moi; je veux qu'elle m'ait cette obligation" (7:70).

Suffering from heartbreak and disappointment in her marriage, financial stress, and physical and depressive ailments,<sup>40</sup> Émilie views educating her children at home as a source of satisfaction and happiness ("satisfaction," "bonheur"; 3:93) absent from many other aspects of her life. Likewise, Sévigné tries to convince her daughter Françoise-Marguerite that educating

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<sup>39</sup> For examples, see 7:70; 8:135, 310-314, 453-457 (455).

<sup>40</sup> For examples, see *Montbrillant*, 1:463-465; 2:367-370, 456-457.

Pauline at home can be a source of consolation, amusement, and occupation (7:68) in the face of Françoise-Marguerite's illnesses and financial problems.

The scope of Sévigné's efforts is personal; in all of her *plaidoyers*,<sup>41</sup> she is concerned with convincing her daughter to keep Pauline at home. D'Épinay, on the other hand, tries to persuade all mothers that they should, like Émilie, make becoming "maîtresse de l'éducation de [leurs] enfans" (2:80) their highest goal.<sup>42</sup> To convince her public that resisting societal conventions and prejudices to educate daughters at home is worth the effort, she shows them the dangers and poor results of "une éducation timide et incertaine" (1:4).<sup>43</sup> Émilie's family and convention dictate that her son should go to a *collège* and have a *précepteur* (2:56). The education he receives at their hands is "moyenne; [...] contradictoire et incertaine" (2:608), and the results of his moral and ethical formation are disappointing. Only belatedly does Émilie get the chance to educate him, once his moral and intellectual development have been delayed, and eventually he begins to show promise (3:558). On the other hand, Émilie's family allows her to educate her daughter as she sees fit, and Pauline is caring and intelligent as a result. D'Épinay also wins over readers through appeals to pragmatism, by showing them how her educational curriculum will help families to get their daughters married, and will ensure their happiness in marriage. Moreover, d'Épinay's demonstration of the dire consequences for women who find themselves in abusive marriages underscores that mothers have an imperative to embrace her methods. Finally, d'Épinay shows her female readers that becoming educators is a meaningful way to spend their time, a way to help the next generation and a consolation for the pain and disappointments in their own lives.

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<sup>41</sup> See Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 3:1334n2.

<sup>42</sup> See also 2:251.

<sup>43</sup> See also 2:295.

Though Pauline de Grignan and Pauline de Montbrillant both possess traits like humor and charm that allow Sévigné and d'Épinay to paint an attractive portrait of women educating their daughters, both Paulines are imperfect, and both authors have to develop strategies to overcome their character flaws. In early 1689, Sévigné tells her daughter that she should not expect Pauline to be perfect, especially as she has just come out of a convent (7:321). Sévigné thinks that Françoise-Marguerite is too hard on Pauline:

si j'étais avec vous, je lui rendrais de grands offices, rien qu'en redressant un peu votre imagination et en vous demandant si une petite personne qui ne songe qu'à plaire et à se corriger, qui vous aime, qui vous craint et qui a bien de l'esprit, n'est pas dans le rang de tout ce qu'il y a de meilleur. (7:321)

Anticipating Locke and Rousseau,<sup>44</sup> she recommends using gentleness and reason to correct Pauline and to harness the young girl's desire to correct herself, rather than scolding: "je vous assure que la douceur et la raison auront tout pouvoir sur elle; quelle autre manière pourroit être bonne à quelqu'un qui a de l'esprit, et qui ne songe qu'à se corriger et qu'à vous plaire?" (7:470).<sup>45</sup> Despite her flaws, Pauline's desire to please, her intellect, and her good sense redeem her character.

Pauline de Montbrillant's defects are her stubbornness and pride, and her redeeming qualities are her sensitivity and desire to please and to correct herself.<sup>46</sup> Her mother plans to study Pauline's character over time and to devise and continually revise a plan of education that is best suited to it and to her governess' talents (3:27), a course of action in line with d'Épinay's emphasis, in the first of *Montbrillant's* prefaces, on studying a child's character in order to devise a program of education for her (1:4). Émilie's initial plan for Pauline is not so different

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<sup>44</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts*, 121-22; Rousseau, *Mémoire présenté à M. de Mably*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> The wording is different in the 1972 edition. See Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. by Duchêne, 3:613.

<sup>46</sup> See 2:459, 609; 3:34-35.

from Sévigné's recommendations for overcoming her granddaughter's defects. Émilie is chiefly concerned with making sure that Pauline does not reject her education, and she therefore has to work around the idiosyncrasies of Pauline's character. As Sévigné recommends, she uses kindness and reason to harness Pauline's desire to correct her own flaws (d'Épinay 3:34-35). For example, Émilie advises Pauline's governess, Mlle Durand, that if Pauline seems to be getting bored with her daily half-hour of religious reading, "il faudra tâcher de la ramener avec beaucoup d'amitié" (3:32). In this case, Mlle Durand must first try reasoning with Pauline, telling her that every thing has its time, including studying catechism and playing with dolls, and if that does not work, she must not appear to have noticed Pauline's distraction but must ask some questions or make some remarks that will reengage Pauline with her reading material. In so doing, Mlle Durand will take away an occasion for Pauline to give herself over to stubbornness and bad humor. If that does not work either, Émilie stresses, Mlle Durand must not scold Pauline because this would have "un effet tout à fait contraire à nos vues" (3:32).

Besides following Sévigné in the general principles that should underlie Pauline's education, d'Épinay also adopts the same curricular elements, namely, reading, conversation, and writing. Reading is a cornerstone of her granddaughter's education, and Sévigné often writes to Françoise-Marguerite with suggestions of reading material for Pauline, who, at age fifteen, "devours" books (8:391). Her grandmother encourages the development of this trait by suggesting a wide range of reading from novels and comedies to historical and moral works (8:392). Sévigné is not worried that Pauline might be corrupted by something she has read, because it would be difficult for reading material to corrupt a woman of substance who already has a strong moral character and intellect – a radical notion at the time – but she nevertheless warns her daughter against giving Pauline reading that is too advanced for her age (8:280-281,



392). She encourages Françoise-Marguerite to discuss with her daughter what Pauline is reading, for such reflection “lui serait le plus utile” (8:392), much the same way that, in their letters to each other, Sévigné and Françoise-Marguerite discuss works they have read,<sup>47</sup> sprinkling literary allusions throughout.

In *Montbrillant*, although she does not mention as many specific authors’ names as Sévigné, Émilie makes recommendations to Pauline’s governess regarding her reading material that resemble Sévigné’s advice to Françoise-Marguerite in several respects. Foremost among them is Émilie’s emphasis on discussion and the idea that Pauline must be encouraged to ask questions about what she has read, rather than simply memorizing it (3:32-34). Émilie also stresses that a young Pauline should not be given material like La Fontaine’s *Fables* that she cannot yet understand;<sup>48</sup> reading must be age-appropriate (3:34).

The importance of reading in Sévigné’s curriculum goes hand-in-hand with an emphasis on conversation as a pedagogical tool. Sévigné recommends that Françoise-Marguerite reason with her daughter and converse with her with “amitié” and “confiance” (7:68), following a kind of Socratic model in which Pauline’s critical thinking and ability to examine assumptions would develop through conversation.

Similarly, in *Montbrillant*, Émilie writes to Pauline’s governess that she must encourage Pauline to converse with her almost all day long. First, she must encourage Pauline’s questions

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<sup>47</sup> For examples, see 6:22-24; 8:463-464.

<sup>48</sup> Rousseau makes a similar recommendation concerning La Fontaine in *Julie* and *Émile*: Rousseau, *Julie*, ed. by Coulet, 2:209 (Vème partie, lettre III). Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gagnebin and others, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 4:351-357. A possible source for Rousseau’s and d’Épinay’s reaction against La Fontaine is a 1699 French translation of Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, in which the translator added La Fontaine’s *Fables* and *Contes* as suggested reading material, where Locke had put *Raynard the Fox* (Locke, *Some Thoughts*, ed. by Yolton and Yolton, p. 66).

about her catechism. Then, during their two-hour-long walks,<sup>49</sup> Mlle Durand must engage Pauline in conversation about the wonders of nature all around them:

tout en causant, tâchez d'exciter et d'entretenir en elle cette curiosité qui est si naturelle aux enfans, et qui leur apprend plus, si on sait la mettre à profit, que tous les maîtres ensemble. Pour cela, il faut lui faire des questions à propos, et lui donner occasion d'en faire à son tour. Il ne faut pas la blâmer quand elle dit une chose fausse; mais, sans pédanterie, la convaincre du contraire par le raisonnement, par l'évidence, et non par les préceptes et les maximes. C'est surtout aux yeux des enfans qu'il faut parler, encore plus qu'à leur esprit. (3:32)

Besides the central place of conversation, we also see d'Épinay promoting Enlightenment principles – the use of reason, direct experience, and empirical evidence – as the bases of knowledge, and the necessity of contact with nature. For d'Épinay, a young girl is as capable of learning about the world from these methods as any boy – or any *philosophe*.

Pauline's history and geography lessons are also achieved through conversation because “à force d'en causer et de la questionner sur ce que vous lui aurez dit, elle le retiendra à la fin bien mieux, et d'une manière moins ennuyeuse” (3:34). D'Épinay also includes an account of a conversation between Émilie and her children that shows readers how they can profit from any time they have with their children – during a meal, for example – to teach them important things. In this discussion, Émilie's children ask her what *le sort* is and what atoms are (3:97-98). Both her son and daughter participate actively in this conversation; girls are thought to be equally as capable of grappling with fate and atoms as boys. Not only is this a radical idea in its own right,<sup>50</sup> but it will also, d'Épinay suggests, make for egalitarian relationships between the men and women educated this way.

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<sup>49</sup> D'Épinay and Rousseau agreed on the importance of contact with nature and may have inspired each other in this regard.

<sup>50</sup> D'Épinay is not the only author, however, to hold such views. See, for example, Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*.

In *Montbrillant*, d'Épinay emphasizes writing as a pedagogical tool, reminding us of Sévigné's recommendations to Françoise-Marguerite that Pauline should fill the role of her secretary and thus learn from her mother's way of thinking and writing. Throughout Sévigné's letters, as we see Pauline grow older, we see her personality and voice emerge more and more. From playing secretary, she moves on to writing her own letters and a novel for her family.<sup>51</sup> In d'Épinay's novel, which is as much about Émilie's education as about Pauline's, we see the same kind of development happen in Émilie as she grows up. Moreover, writing brings about a veritable metamorphosis in her character.

The novel begins with a description of Émilie's inadequate education, in which her female relatives teach her how to please others by telling them what they want to hear, a course of action made necessary by Émilie's financial dependence following her father's death, but one that threatens to rob her of the capacity to develop convictions of her own.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, her tutor, M. de Lisieux asks Émilie to write to him often, not just letters, but a journal, praises her when her writing is "franc et naïf," and encourages her always to write in her own voice:

Je ne puis encore m'empêcher de vous prier de ne jamais parler que d'après vous. Soyez vous, soyez-le avec vos vertus et vos défauts, sans quoi vos défauts vous resteront, et les vertus des autres que vous voudrez adopter masqueront, et peut-être à la longue étoufferont les vôtres. (1:69)

Corresponding with M. de Lisieux provides the only education of value that Émilie receives until she has reached adulthood, and through their correspondence, d'Épinay shows the potential fruits of learning-by-writing, as in Sévigné, where Pauline learns to write and think through participating in the exchange of letters between her mother and grandmother. When it is Émilie's turn to educate her own daughter Pauline, Émilie's pedagogical principles build upon and are

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<sup>51</sup> On the novel, see 8:455, 472-474.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, 1:45-48.

refined from those of M. de Lisieux. Though early on in Pauline's education, Émilie simply states that "L'écriture ne doit point être oubliée dans le nombre de ses occupations" (3:34), readers later see Pauline, in her mother's absence, voluntarily taking two writing lessons per day, so that she can express her gratitude to the doctor who saves her mother's life (3:279).

We can trace the qualities that M. de Lisieux prizes when it comes to writing back to Sévigné, for whom writing naturally and easily ("naturellement," "facilement") is a capacity that can only be developed, paradoxically, through a great deal of regular practice (5:153-154).<sup>53</sup> M. de Lisieux seems to echo Sévigné's injunction to Françoise-Marguerite's step daughters, "Vous devez m'écrire, et me conter mille choses, mais naturellement, et sans vous en faire une affaire" (5:153), when he urges Émilie to be herself in her letters. D'Épinay takes this idea already present in Sévigné and pushes it further in *Montbrillant*, starting with the earliest of the novel's prefaces: one of the reasons Émilie's letters are worth reading, claims M. de Lisieux, the purported author of this preface, is because "Le naturel, la sensibilité, la crédulité et la douceur de son âme, font le caractère de ses lettres" (1:5). This list of qualities originally included "[la] grande facilité qu'elle avait à écrire" and "la franchise" (1:5nn2-3). Besides echoing Sévigné's values for good writing,<sup>54</sup> these qualities suggest that sincerity forms the cornerstone of Émilie's plan of education. Sincerity requires plumbing the depths of one's heart and learning to articulate to others, clearly and forthrightly, what one finds there. Learning to write naturally and with "franchise" is one way to achieve this ideal.

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<sup>53</sup> Writing letters naturally was a highly prized capability in eighteenth-century French society. On how women learned this skill, see Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 133-157. Sévigné was considered exemplary in this regard. See Perrin's prefaces, 1:v, xx-xxii.

<sup>54</sup> The list raises another of Sévigné's qualities the eighteenth century valued: her sensibility. See Montfort Howard, *Fortunes*, 79-86.

Another way we see the importance of sincerity in *Émilie*'s curriculum is that the development of Pauline's virtues is much more important than appearances. Every night, her governess, Mlle Durand must make Pauline make "un examen moral et exact de tout ce qu'elle aura fait dans la journée" (3:34). "[F]ormer son cœur" is the principle theme of Pauline's education,<sup>55</sup> and, *Émilie* explains, "le but de mon éducation est d'élever l'âme de mon enfant." As for the mind, "L'esprit ira tout seul; ou, si les progrès en sont lents, ils seront du moins sûrs et solides" (3:36). *Émilie* does not deny the importance of being able to conduct oneself successfully to one's advantage in the world, but she requires that this not become an obsession, and she does not want Pauline to become fixated on pleasing or displeasing any one person in particular (3:35-36), as *Émilie* herself had been encouraged to do.<sup>56</sup> *Émilie* thinks that her daughter's education will improve Pauline's lot in life... and her future husband's: as d'Épinay wrote in the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, *Émilie* writes to Mlle Durand, "Les sots entêtés de leurs vieux préjugés diront peut-être que nous n'y entendons rien. Laissez-les dire; un jour à venir, elle et son mari nous remercieront" (3:36).

The idea of developing qualities to make a woman a more desirable marriage partner was not new. Many aristocratic families tried to leverage their daughters' beauty, charm, and accomplishments like drawing, singing, or playing an instrument into marriage proposals.<sup>57</sup> But Sévigné's and d'Épinay's strategies privilege a young girl's intelligence, ethics, and capacity for

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<sup>55</sup> Rousseau uses this phrase in the *Mémoire présenté à M. de Mably* (19) and d'Épinay the same words in *Lettres à mon fils* (Weinreb ed., 24).

<sup>56</sup> D'Épinay was not the only eighteenth-century pedagogue to point out the dangers of inculcating in girls an insincere politeness and an excessive desire to please. See Bérenguier, *Conduct Books*, 79-96.

<sup>57</sup> Virtue as an important means of attracting a husband is a topos in d'Épinay's *Conversations* and in educational treatises of the period by other authors who seized upon the idea of changing society through changing marriage through changing the education of girls. See Bérenguier, *Conduct Books*, 89-90, 99, 104-105.

self-expression. These qualities will help young women to marry, and more importantly to enjoy happy, harmonious partnerships with their husbands. The two Paulines differ radically from Rousseau's relatively uneducated Sophie, who has only read two books and whose husband will have "le plaisir de lui tout enseigner."<sup>58</sup> Instead the Paulines, and the young women educated according to the model they provide, possess a strong moral and intellectual foundation that they can share with their husbands.

The Sévigné-d'Épinay intertext helps us better understand d'Épinay's work: when thinking about women's education, she turned not simply to Rousseau and other male authors, as has so often been said, but also to Sévigné, whose ideas she adapted to fit the Enlightenment ideals of observation, reason, and experiential learning. This model – one woman learning from another – is re-enacted in *Montbrillant*, and exploring the intertext with Sévigné helps us see that d'Épinay's novel is in fact an educational manifesto and guide for mothers seeking a model for how to educate their children at home. *Montbrillant*'s radical pedagogical message takes for granted that mothers are capable of becoming educators, that girls are just as capable as boys of learning to interrogate the world around them and to think critically, and that everyone's lives – those of men and women alike – would be dramatically improved by their doing just that.

The links between the two authors allow us to see a previously hidden part of the network of women reading and responding to other women's reflections on women's education.<sup>59</sup> They also reveal how French women writers envisioned a future in which companionate marriage would replace dowry-based unions.<sup>60</sup> For Sévigné and d'Épinay, such marriages would be built on moral and intellectual compatibility, rather than on the woman's ignorance, à la Rousseau.

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<sup>58</sup> Rousseau, *Émile*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gagnebin and others, 4:769-770.

<sup>59</sup> Parts of it have been uncovered. See, for example, Bérenguier, *Conduct Books*, 27, 54.

<sup>60</sup> On marital choice, see Goodman, "Marriage Choice and Marital Success"; Thomason, *Matrimonial Trap*.

For d'Épinay, sincerity was the most important element in companionate marriage, and in the next two chapters, I will examine how d'Épinay wanted to teach girls to be sincere.

## Chapter Six: Reading *Montbrillant* as an Education in Sincerity

I conceive of sincerity in French society in the years d'Épinay was writing as the marriage of honesty and sensibility. Being sincere could be a kind of heroic gesture, similar to throwing down the gauntlet, that required people to make revelations about the activity in their inner selves, and to back it up by demonstrations of emotion, logic, and confessions, the more unflattering the better. Sincerity provided nobles with a way to reassert their importance in an era when their earlier military functions had lost importance and in which upward and downward social mobility was increasing. At the same time, sincerity was in many ways becoming more democratic: anyone could prove their sincerity – and by extension, their nobility of spirit – by being sincere (or seeming to be so, as sincerity can be difficult to prove and some people are capable of faking it). Regardless of whether one could prove it or not, a person could become more inwardly noble by being sincere. There are many arguments to be made about how people could delude themselves into thinking they are sincere when they are not, but for d'Épinay and Grimm, at least, being sincere required a deep knowledge of the self.

Many novels and educational treatises tied sincerity to staying in one's place in society. Examples include novels like Mme de Tencin's *Mémoires du Comte de Comminge* (1735), love stories in which the protagonists always fall in love with people who are equally as noble as they are, and educational works like Fénelon's *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (1687), Mme de Lambert's *Avis d'une mère à son fils* (1726) and *Avis d'une mère à sa fille* (1728), and the way Mme de Maintenon arranged her school at Saint-Cyr,<sup>1</sup> all of which link not rising above the estate into which one is born with being true to oneself and to others. These messages were increasingly replaced, in the mid-to-late-eighteenth century, with others in which the two values

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<sup>1</sup> See Maintenon, *Lettres historiques et édifiantes adressées aux dames de Saint-Louis*.



were completely divorced from each other, including in storylines about love and marriage in novels such as those by Mme Riccoboni,<sup>2</sup> memoirs including those of Rousseau and Mme Roland,<sup>3</sup> and educational works like *Montbrillant*. The date around which we believe d'Épinay began writing *Montbrillant*, 1756, places her squarely at a key moment of transition.

In that *période charnière*, d'Épinay proposes an educational curriculum that would make women exceptionally sincere, suggesting that sincerity can replace a dowry and that sincerity can also improve the quality of a marriage. However, we must understand that rather than simply making sincerity the equivalent of a dowry – in other words, putting a monetary value on sincerity – what d'Épinay proposes is the complete replacement of one marriage system, in which a woman is equated with a price, with another, in which sincerity and intellectual communion, and the faithfulness that she imagines follows from them, are worth so much more than a dowry that it is impossible to put a price on them. Indeed, men also must cultivate the values that will lead to this kind of relationship. Receiving a sincerity-based education would also lead nobles – and all people – to act more ethically, which would lead, suggests d'Épinay, to reform of state institutions like the tax farm. These changes could have had wide-ranging social and economic repercussions.<sup>4</sup>

How does d'Épinay define sincerity? She never provides a neat, dictionary-style definition of what the term meant to her. However, by using the deductive method that reading an educational novel requires, we can conclude that her use of the term comes close to how the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defined it throughout the eighteenth century, with minor

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Riccoboni, *Lettres de Mistriss Fanni Butlerd*.

<sup>3</sup> See Rousseau, *Confessions* and Roland, *Mémoires de Madame Roland*.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, d'Épinay's novel was not published until after the French Revolution, so it had no chance to impact revolutionary thinking directly. However, many of the ideas in *Montbrillant* reappear in d'Épinay's other works.

changes from edition to edition. Here, for example, is the 1762 definition: “SINCÉRITÉ. s.f. Candeur, franchise, qualité de ce qui est sincère. *Il paroît une grande sincérité dans ses actions, dans ses discours, dans ses manières. Je vous parle avec sincérité. Il n' y a point de sincérité dans son procédé.*”<sup>5</sup> Like this definition, d’Épinay’s work above all suggests connections between sincerity and other concepts like franchise. If I had to choose one quotation from all of d’Épinay’s *œuvre* to use to summarize her definition of sincerity, it would be this passage from *Les Lettres à mon fils*:

Celui qui veut plaire sans exception finit ordinairement par déplaire à tout le monde. L’homme d’esprit et d’honneur tient une autre conduite. Quand il a examiné ses actions et ses sentiments avec la sévérité qu’il se doit à lui-même, il ne s’abaisse pas à les dissimuler, il les avoue avec confiance, persuadé que, quelle que soit la diversité de ses opinions, il ne pourra dans aucun cas blesser des juges équitables en disant la sienne: la droiture de son cœur, la pureté de ses intentions lui garantissent l’estime publique. (126-127)

A number of these themes recur throughout her work, notably in *Montbrillant*: the danger of trying to please everyone, the central place of self-examination, and learning to speak one’s thoughts with confidence. The antithesis of sincerity for d’Épinay is dissimulation. We might describe her vision of sincerity as close to the one I described as emblematic of the time period: being sincere is the heroic act of an honorable person, and is characterized by revelations of one’s inner thoughts and emotions to others, frankness in speech, and a confidence in one’s own moral compass. In order to read this moral compass, the sincere person must undertake a thorough and rigorous examination of his “actions et [...] sentiments” to be sure he can trust the compass. He can trust it if he examines himself and finds that he is morally upright and pure in intentions. This process of self-examination is the secular counterpart to a Catholic religious practice, the examination of conscience or the *examen*, which is careful reflection on one’s

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<sup>5</sup> Sincérité, *Dictionnaires d’autrefois*.

thoughts, words, and deeds – things done and not done – in order to determine how closely one conforms to Christian moral law as expressed in the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments, for example. The *examen* is associated with Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who believed that it should be the cornerstone of religious practice. Besides being a heroic act, being sincere is, for d'Épinay, also a virtue, and her advocacy of use of a secular version of the *examen* as a way to get in touch with one's moral compass is part of a comprehensive educational philosophy that would teach people to seek the truth and learn how to express it first, before teaching them Catholic catechism. The idea behind it, I argue, as we can also see from Grimm's writing, is that people who learn to find the truth unerringly will naturally follow their inner moral compass to the true religion, whereas if they simply memorize the tenets of religious faith beginning when they are in the cradle, what they internalize will be meaningless. For a person to be sincere, she must completely align her inner compass and her outer demeanor, acts, and speech. Like Aristotle's command to "know thyself," knowing oneself is a key commandment in d'Épinay's educational philosophy. She was not alone in espousing these views. Notably, Grimm also presents a vision of a sincerity-based system of education in 1755 issues of the *Correspondance littéraire*, and Rousseau's *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* was likely inspired in part by d'Épinay and Grimm's ideas.

For the time being, we will examine *Montbrillant*. At first glance, the novel seems to present an apologetics for dissimulation, arguing that women must dissimulate in order to protect themselves. The work ultimately shows, however, that dissimulation deforms the self and that it keeps women divided, unable to share their experiences, and unable to work together against the patriarchal system. We will see that Émilie and her lover Volx are complex embodiments of sincerity, and we will see that personifying this virtue in the form of three-dimensional

characters gives d'Épinay an opportunity to connect sincerity to a constellation of other character traits, like *naïveté* and *franchise*. We will see Émilie grow in wisdom, moral discernment, and sincerity as her character evolves. We will see a model of education that teaches dissimulation – the one Émilie receives – and, in contrast, a model of education that teaches sincerity – the one Pauline receives. D'Épinay co-opts Catholic ideas, structures, and habits to teach and cultivate a secular version of sincerity. I will analyze three such structures: first, a rule adapted from religious orders; second, a version of the Ignation examination of conscience that teaches a person to be sincere; and, finally, the idea that a person can continually work toward perfection in sincerity with the help of a guide, a kind of secular “spiritual” director.

I think that the methods d'Épinay suggested to teach sincerity, the uses d'Épinay proposed to make of sincerity in marriage, how she wanted to use it to transform young people, women especially, into modern individuals, and how important courage and strength are to sincerity in her vision are what is most interesting about the concept of sincerity in her work. Overall, d'Épinay's definition of sincerity is a common sense definition. In her work, we do not find anything that deconstructs common notions of the concept.<sup>6</sup> D'Épinay operates as though an inner self and will exist, and she thought it would be a great thing for women to develop a kind of subjectivity based on notions of sincerity and to cultivate their inner selves.

There is a way in which d'Épinay jars our conventional ideas about sincerity, though, and that is, as we have seen, that she insists that her life not be the measure of her works. The promotion of sincerity, the commandment to “know thyself,” and the stress on accurately reading one's inner compass in no way obliges d'Épinay to tell her life story faithfully in *Montbrillant*.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, we do not find anything in d'Épinay at all resembling the essays in the “Declining Sincerity” section of *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, Van Alphen, Bal, Smith, eds. (2009), which describe subjects who, in refusing to be sincere, demonstrate that there is no distinction between an inner and an outer self, and therefore, no inner self.

She chose a form that she undoubtedly felt would better express her points and persuade readers to use her educational program.

### Sincerity in *Montbrillant*

In the examination of *Montbrillant* that follows, I will focus on women's education, although d'Épinay advocated that men, also, should cultivate their sincerity. *Montbrillant*'s educational messages for women are focused on sincerity and dissimulation, and whereas the model of a weak education in the first part mostly teaches dissimulation, in the second part, Émilie chiefly teaches Pauline to be sincere. I will explore these two contrasting educations in detail.<sup>7</sup> I will begin with Émilie's education, by examining her three types of experiences with dissimulation. First, there is the early education that she receives from her female relatives and a priest during her childhood, which encourages her to dissimulate, but the young girl does not take to it naturally, due to her character, which shows a kind of in-born, natural sincerity. Second, in adolescence and early adulthood, Émilie comes into close contact with some individuals, including her best friend and her husband, who are highly skilled dissimulators, and Émilie's spirit is crushed by their subterfuge and betrayals. And, finally, Émilie realizes that she must dissimulate for reasons of self-protection, and I will trace her gradual *apprentissage* and mastery of using dissimulation techniques to protect herself and to benefit her children.

There is what at first appears to be a paradoxical justification or apologetics of deceit in a work that champions sincerity above all else, but this apparent paradox is resolved by the idea that Émilie uses dissimulation as a mechanism of self-protection against victimization, which is, more often than not, the result of others' duplicity. In addition, *Montbrillant* shows that

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<sup>7</sup> Weinreb also remarks on the contrasts between mother and daughter as educators. See *Eagle*, 52-53; 66.

dissimulation ultimately deforms the self and is therefore only useful as a short-term survival strategy, but not as a foundation for a friendship or a marriage. After examining dissimulation as a self-protection device, I will then discuss *Montbrillant*'s messages on sincerity.

### Dissimulation in Émilie's Early Life

Sincerity (and dissimulation, as we will see) are part of a constellation of closely-related terms, traits, and ideas in the novel, and in her early life, Émilie embodies not only sincerity, but also innocence, gullibility, naiveté, and honesty. As she matures in her mastery of sincerity, her gullibility and naiveté will be replaced by strength, wisdom, and courage (*fermeté*). Émilie can be described as a complex representation of sincerity, uniting sensibility and virtue.

The reader first meets Émilie just after she has lost her father and she and her mother have gone to live with her uncle and inhospitable aunt de Bernon. She is a likeable protagonist who appeals to the reader because she is an underdog who is vulnerable, and who, in a twist of fate, has experienced a tragic loss and then, falling into the hands of her cruel aunt, is rejected and mistreated by a person who has been charged with protecting and helping raise her, while the rest of the family stands by, sometimes tacitly complicit, other times blaming Émilie outright for her own abuse. In addition, in contrast to her evil aunt, Émilie is young, innocent, naïve, guileless, honest, gullible, and well intentioned. These traits cause her a great deal of difficulty, because they are in contradiction to the values that the female members of her family teach her.

One feature of the mis-education provided by Émilie's family is that conflicts within the family implicitly encourage the young girl to dissimulate. Many of the conflicts in the early part of the novel arise from different conceptions of how Émilie, a noble who is impoverished, should be treated. In contrast to her relationship with her aunt de Bernon who scorns Émilie's poverty,

the young girl has a close relationship with her great-aunt, the Marquise de Beaufort, who seems to show genuine affection toward her and to whom *Émilie* refers as “Maman.” One reason Beaufort likes *Émilie* so much is because she is of noble blood, and Beaufort fills her head with ideas about how a young noblewoman should act and how she deserves to be treated. These ideas sometimes cause *Émilie* to butt heads with the Bernon relatives on whom she is dependent and with her mother, who thinks that *Émilie* should be grateful to the Bernons and should be cowed when faced with her cruel aunt. In her mother’s eyes, Maman de Beaufort is a bad influence. In this situation, torn between relatives, *Émilie* attempts to dissimulate: she admits that sometimes when she is alone with her mother, she pretends not to approve of her great-aunt de Beaufort in order to try to avoid getting the lecture from her mother that would inevitably follow if *Émilie* were to express her true feelings.<sup>8</sup> However, in such cases, *Émilie* often gets in trouble when her duplicity is revealed because she is a bad liar and has failed at dissimulation. *Émilie*’s mother and great-aunt put the young girl in an impossible bind: she will be punished regardless of whether or not she tells the truth. The lesson young *Émilie* could take away from such incidents is that it is better to dissimulate well and avoid punishment rather than to be either honest or to dissimulate halfway. But *Émilie* never becomes a hardened dissimulator; throughout her childhood, she remains someone who is too sincere, and suffers the consequences for it.

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<sup>8</sup> “[...] je faisais quelque semblant, lorsque j’étais seule avec ma mère, de désapprouver maman Beaufort, pour éviter la moitié du sermon qui ne manquait pas de suivre ordinairement ses visites” (Badinter ed., 1:175). See also Roth ed., 1:55, where *Émilie* writes to M. de Lisieux:

J’ai besoin de vos conseils, mon cher tuteur. Que deviendrai-je dans le monde pervers où je vais entrer? Je crois que j’y aurai beaucoup à souffrir. Si c’était un moyen de faire mon salut, je m’y soumettrais volontiers ; mais je ne sais le plus souvent à quoi me déterminer pour bien faire, et c’est principalement sur les différens principes et les diverses opinions des gens en qui j’ai confiance et à qui je suis soumise que je vous demande en grâce de me donner votre avis. Plusieurs fois vous avez vu que ma mère me blâmait et me défendait les mêmes choses que maman de Beaufort approuvait

A second lesson young *Émilie*'s female relatives impart is that because she is reduced to financial ruin and dependence on others following her father's death, she must dissimulate. Her mother teaches her to extract profit from being in the good graces of others,<sup>9</sup> and although *Émilie*'s survival and future literally depend on it, the necessary dissimulation plunges *Émilie* into two moral dilemmas. First, in order to please people so that they will support her, *Émilie* must tell them what she thinks they want to hear. She must be attuned to their wants and needs rather than to her own, and to such a degree that she must deny any of her own thoughts and feelings that contradict what they want. Telling people what they want to hear thus inevitably leads to dissimulation sometimes. And with time, she may even stop developing convictions of her own that she could express instead; thus, dependence and dissimulation threaten to rob *Émilie* of her capacity for self-expression.<sup>10</sup> *Émilie* finds it unnatural and chafes against the idea that she must only say and do things that will please others, with no thought given to her own needs and desires. A second dilemma arises when *Émilie* wonders how she can possibly please two people who want conflicting things from her – like her mother and great-aunt de Beaufort – and *Émilie* would therefore have to contradict herself to please both of them. She wants to know how her well-liked great-aunt manages such situations, and writes to ask her:

ma mère m'a dit [...] une chose que je trouve bien singulière; c'est que je suis assez grande pour étudier la façon de penser des gens que je vois et surtout ceux dont je dépends, pour ne rien faire ni ne rien dire devant eux qui y soit contraire, afin de gagner leurs bonnes grâces par tout ce qui peut leur plaire, parce que c'est ainsi, dit-elle, qu'on réussit dans le monde... Mais c'est une peine bien grande, ce me semble. Est-ce comme cela que vous faites, maman, vous que tout le monde trouve si aimable? Mais il faut donc mentir lorsqu'on se trouve avec deux personnes qui pensent différemment?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Badinter ed., 1:107.

<sup>10</sup> Weinreb comments that as a young married woman, *Émilie* had indeed been turned into an "empty vessel filled in turn by her mother, her aunt, her priest, her tutor, and her husband, instructed by all to defer and to be pleasing" (*Eagle*, 53).

<sup>11</sup> Badinter ed., 1:45.



The Marquise de Beaufort does not directly answer *Émilie*'s question, but often advises *Émilie*'s mother to focus only on teaching her to follow her principles: "gravez au fond de son cœur les principes qui font pratiquer le bien et fuir le mal. Avec cela, peu important les faux jugements."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, *Émilie*'s mother's "grande faiblesse dans le caractère," love for her daughter, and fear that anyone would see her daughter with different eyes than she does leads her mother to encourage *Émilie* to dissimulate in order to try to please everyone rather than developing principles.<sup>13</sup> The message that *Émilie* usually gets from her family is that to resolve such dilemmas where two people want different things from her, she must be contradictory things at once, a mandate that she cannot possibly meet, or else she must have no fixed sense of self and must bend to suit the whims of those around her.

*Émilie*'s father had been a loyal subject of the crown, and in a passage emblematic of how dependence drives dissimulation, *Émilie*'s family forces her to beg for money from the king's minister at court.<sup>14</sup> Her mother has the little girl dress up and notably violates her anti-make-up stance by making the little girl wear rouge, and her family and their friends coach *Émilie* to say and do things she would never say of her own accord, namely to throw herself at the minister's feet and ask for bread, which the little girl does not understand, thinking it means that is all he will give them for lunch. The next day, however, *Émilie*'s mother reveals her hypocrisy by dressing *Émilie* up in the most modest possible fashion and taking her to visit a

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<sup>12</sup> Badinter ed., 1:53.

<sup>13</sup> "[...] Mme de Gondrecourt, avec une âme droite et douce, avait une grande faiblesse dans le caractère et un amour si grand pour sa fille, qu'elle craignait toujours qu'on ne la vît pas des mêmes yeux qu'elle; et, pour vouloir tout prévoir et tout parer, elle allait souvent au-devant du mal qu'elle craignait. *Émilie*, de son côté, adorait sa mère et feignait souvent d'être de son avis pour ne pas l'affliger, ou la suivait aveuglément par vénération et par condescendance, ne croyant pas qu'elle pût errer" (Badinter ed., 1:53).

<sup>14</sup> Badinter ed., 1:45-48.

*dévote*. She specifically tells Émilie not to mention the *rouge* and finery she had worn the previous day:

Hier je croyais que j'allais être encore bien parée, car ma mère m'avait dit qu'elle me mènerait faire des visites. Point du tout ; on m'a habillée si modestement que j'en étouffais. J'ai demandé pourquoi ce vilain mouchoir de mousseline? Ma mère m'a répondu que nous irions chez Mme de Ternan, la femme du fermier général, qui est dévote, et qu'il fallait être mise simplement et modestement afin de lui plaire. Elle m'a bien recommandé de ne point dire devant cette dame que j'avais mis du rouge la veille.<sup>15</sup>

This episode shows, in an especially concrete way, that to Émilie's mother, motivated as she is by need, appearance is more important than substance.<sup>16</sup>

One area where this is especially true is the censorship of Émilie's letters by her mother and great-aunt, who make it their aim to suppress the young girl's developing authentic voice and replace it with ventriloquized, conventional *formules de politesse*. In the following passage, for example, Émilie has written a letter – overflowing with gratitude, a genuine expression of feelings – to Mlle Anselme, the governess hired for her cousin, who was teaching Émilie on the side out of the goodness of her heart. Émilie's great-aunt de Beaufort does not find Émilie's chosen words to be appropriate to her noble rank and instructs her that she should tone them down:

Prenez garde [...] à bien connaître les termes dont vous vous servez. Par exemple, vous avez raison d'être sensible à ce que Mlle Anselme fait pour vous. [...] Marquez-lui beaucoup de reconnaissance et d'amitié, mais ne dites plus *ses bontés* lorsque vous parlez de ses soins pour vous. Cette épithète ne convient qu'en parlant de la tendresse que nos supérieurs nous marquent. Que je n'entende pas davantage: *C'est une charmante fille*. Expression basse et commune. Prenez une façon de parler plus élevée, et qui sente moins le commérage.<sup>17</sup>

This education is no doubt helpful and benefits Émilie as she learns to navigate in society, but at the same time, it represents a loss of authenticity and threatens to tamp down the spontaneous

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<sup>15</sup> Badinter ed., 1:46-47.

<sup>16</sup> Compare Weinreb's analysis of this episode (*Eagle*, 53).

<sup>17</sup> Badinter ed., 1:74.

enthusiasm for education that Émilie feels, at the same time as tempering her tone.<sup>18</sup> It may come as a surprise, as Beaufort is generally a positive influence on Émilie. After all, she teaches Émilie about what it means to be a noble and to have principles and pride in the face of her mother's weakness. Beaufort, however, like Émilie's mother, "whose *idée fixe* is her daughter's reputation,"<sup>19</sup> is also a caricatured figure, who takes being noble to the extreme; there is some truth to the cruel remark that Émilie's aunt de Bernon throws out that the Marquise de Beaufort believes herself to be a descendent of Saint Louis and is a stuck-up countess.<sup>20</sup> Though Beaufort teaches Émilie important precepts and helps form her identity, Beaufort's caricatured concept of nobility is untenable in practice, as Émilie's experiences show. Being impoverished and victimized by others forces Émilie to reinvent what it means to be a noble, and language is a major part of it. She will truly come to embody noble principles in and through the use of her own authentic language and by expressing herself sincerely after M. de Lisieux shows her the way.<sup>21</sup> Her daughter Pauline is only able to achieve Beaufort's cherished goal for Émilie – to marry a gentleman – after Pauline masters the art of expressing herself this way by undergoing Émilie's educational curriculum – refined, distilled, and expanded from M. de Lisieux's – and thus becoming a new type of noble.

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<sup>18</sup> Though Émilie drinks up the education offered to her cousin Mimi as though she were dying of thirst, it is not a priority for Émilie's family to educate her. Indeed, they prohibit the governess from teaching her directly, and she has to content herself with listening in on her cousin's education instead of receiving her own. This episode shows that in a broader sense, they have no real respect for women's education, which, if used for anything other than fostering conformity, could be seen as unseemly and unnecessary – they would not want to make Émilie or her cousins into unmarriageable bluestockings, after all – and no respect for the educator. On the marriage unworthiness of bluestockings, see Badinter, *Ambition*.

<sup>19</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> "[...] elle dit que vous vous croyez descendue de la côte de saint Louis, et que vous êtes une vraie comtesse de Pimbêche" (Badinter ed., 1:29).

<sup>21</sup> Compare Émilie's experiences using language to Rousseau's remark to d'Épinay that in order to understand him, she would need to use a new dictionary. Émilie, too, was inventing her own new dictionary.

Although her family's censorship of her writing threatens to diminish her authentic self-expression, Émilie remains in some sense impervious to their lessons, as evidenced by the fact that throughout her life, people will use her too-open confidences in order to do her harm. One of the earliest instances of this type of victimization occurs when a priest takes advantage of the vulnerable young girl's devotion and abuses his role as her spiritual director. Father \*\*\*'s control of Émilie extends to every moment of her day through a detailed "rule" he instructs her to follow.<sup>22</sup> As part of this rule, he tells her she must write down everything she hears and send it to him in a journal twice a week because it will further her attempts to attain salvation,<sup>23</sup> but the real reason is that he hopes to gain unbridled access to the most private information about her family, in order to manipulate its members and gain control of them, possibly for financial gain: "[I]'on verra qu'il [le Père de \*\*\*] avait de loin formé le plan de se servir de ces jeunes personnes [les enfants de Mme de Bernon et de Mme de Gondrecourt] pour dominer et gouverner toute la famille,"<sup>24</sup> M. de Lisieux explains. By turning her writing exercises into a field ripe for the exploitation of her secrets, the priest could teach young Émilie that it is best not to and perhaps even dangerous to express herself too freely, or sincerely. However, as when her family members attempt to teach her the same lesson, Émilie again remains somewhat impervious to it due to her innate qualities, and because other forces in her education act as a counterweight to such messages, especially the participation of M. de Lisieux, as we will see in the section on the role sincerity played in her education.

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<sup>22</sup> See 1:58-62.

<sup>23</sup> "Pour vous mettre à portée de tirer parti de tout pour notre salut, je voudrais que [vous] vous assujettissiez à mettre par écrit chaque jour tout ce que vous entendez dire. Vous m'enverriez ce journal deux fois la semaine ; j'y noterai les articles sur lesquels vous devez porter vos réflexions et je vous indiquerai les moyens de les commenter avec fruit," says the priest (1:60).

<sup>24</sup> Badinter ed., 1:106.

If Émilie remained impervious to lessons that would corrupt her, does that mean that she, by nature, is superior to those around her? Does she have a better moral compass than everyone else? To what extent is she exemplary in the sense that anyone can follow her example, and to what extent is she exemplary in the sense that no one else can ever hope to imitate her? While Émilie has some inborn natural advantages when it comes to resisting corruption that some of her readers might not have, I would read her above all as a sensitive person nearly crushed by society. In letters to her doctor, Tronchin, d'Épinay advised him that a sensitive nature cannot fundamentally be changed, and that a person's nature can be molded and modified to a certain extent, but not entirely.<sup>25</sup> D'Épinay believed that Rousseau wanted to wait far too long to teach children morality, because she believed that moral qualities were formed very early. In *Montbrillant*, d'Épinay presents a portrait of a woman who, thanks to society, becomes alienated from her moral compass. But the ongoing process of education she experiences in adulthood puts her back in touch with it. D'Épinay also presents a daughter, Pauline, who will not have to suffer this alienation, because she will learn to read her moral compass accurately in her early years, and a son, who appears to have almost no naturally-occurring moral feeling. What little he has is nearly destroyed by the conventional education he receives, but when his mother finally gains control of his education in adolescence, he starts to show some promise. Ultimately, d'Épinay presents a host of characters with different relationships to their inner moral compasses and uses them to show how the right kind of education can improve any reader's relationship with their own.

### Émilie's Experiences with Dissimulation in Young Adulthood

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, *Moments*, 118-127.

In spite of the messages Émilie has received growing up, into her early adulthood, she remains someone who is too sincere and who believes those around her to be sincere as well, which leads her to be fooled.<sup>26</sup> In a passage that d'Épinay largely reused from the autobiographical *Mon Portrait*, one of her other works, and put into the mouth of Émilie's friend René to describe the young heroine, we learn that Émilie is often the dupe of others, (which outrages the reader on her behalf), because she has not absorbed the lessons of her youth. But at the same time, we see evidence of Émilie's upbringing in the fact that she tries to please everyone:

Vous êtes bonne et souvent dupe; vous ne soupçonnez la méchanceté ou la trahison que lorsqu'elle est avérée. Vous tâtonnez sans cesse pour trouver le bien, pour fuir le mal; et toutes vos actions étant incertaines et contradictoires, soit entre elles, soit avec vos paroles, la peur surtout que vous avez d'offenser ou de blesser les autres, tout cela vous fait passer pour fausse et pour être sans caractère.<sup>27</sup>

Émilie's education has not succeeded in overcoming her inborn sincerity; it has only deformed her character, and paradoxically, made her seem insincere, because she has not been allowed to express herself freely, and in many ways has not developed this capacity. Ironically, it is Émilie's very goodness that makes her appear false in the eyes of others; it is because she tries to please everyone that she ends up hurting herself. Émilie's example provides a cautionary tale to readers about the dangers of raising women to be like Rousseau's counterpart to Émile, Sophie, who is not supposed to have any ideas of her own, but instead must wait for her husband to fill her head with his philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Women should, d'Épinay argues, be precisely the opposite.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cazenobe, Colette. "L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant : un laboratoire de formes romanesques," 232.

<sup>27</sup> B. ed. 2:571. It is striking that Épinay puts these words in Rousseau's mouth, because they seem to be an admission that the kind of educational program Rousseau prescribes for Sophie is to be faulted. Émilie, like Sophie, was raised only to please everyone around her, and in Émilie's case, this is why she has to lie and contradict herself.

<sup>28</sup> See Book V of *L'Émile*.

<sup>29</sup> Badinter expresses a similar idea. See *Ambition*, 392.

They should be able to develop their own well-formed opinions and speak their minds. Like René's portrait of Émilie above, Émilie's tutor's interventions in *Montbrillant* reinforce the idea that when Émilie is duped, it is because of her good nature, not because she lacks intelligence, as Colette Cazenobe has shown.<sup>30</sup> These explanations create compassion for Émilie in the eyes of the reader.

The reader's pity for the hapless heroine continues to grow as, throughout Émilie's early adult life, the humiliations and hurts Émilie suffers because of her good nature pile on, growing increasingly outrageous. A quick listing of some of the more egregious examples of Émilie's falling victim to pitiless dissimulators illustrate to what point the repetition becomes almost ridiculous. I will focus on four characters whose dissimulation and manipulation hurt Émilie greatly: her husband, M. de Montbrillant; her first lover, Formeuse; an intellectual whose friendship and advice she sought, Desbarres; and her confidante and best woman friend (for a time), Mlle Darcy.

Of the many actors, in the professional or the figurative sense, that populate *Montbrillant*, Émilie's husband is one of the most talented. When the charmingly naïve Émilie marries her cousin, M. de Saint-Ulce, who is given the title M. de Montbrillant, she marries him for love, and enters into her union seriously, believing it will be built on a foundation of love and fidelity. Her husband has a wholly different conception of marriage, however, literally treating it as a joke, a means for getting his way in his family and gaining independence and status. He does not give any thought to how the marriage will completely circumscribe Émilie's life, nor would he care. His cheating, which begins shortly after their marriage, shatters Émilie's understanding of their

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<sup>30</sup> Cazenobe, 232.

relationship. She finds out that his commitment was never sincere, beginning with their courtship.

In order to convince his family that he would be driven to insanity if he were not allowed to marry Émilie, M. de Montbrillant had staged a scene of madness.<sup>31</sup> M. de Montbrillant had been sent to live and work with M. de Vaux, nephew of M. de Montbrillant's father and *directeur* of Farms at Saint-Claude outside of Paris. M. de Vaux describes the scene, the culmination of a period of a (faked) "mélancolie noire"<sup>32</sup>: "[...] au milieu des larmes qui coulaient de ses joues, il riait de temps en temps et me regardait avec un air fixe et cherchait autour de lui, comme si le bruit qu'il avait fait en riant l'eût surpris et ne fût pas venu de lui. Je fis ce que je pus pour le ramener à la raison. Il n'entendait rien."<sup>33</sup> This conduct is supposed to be proof of Montbrillant's madness, but it is as if he is laughing at having duped M. Vaux, who is quick to believe him and recommend the marriage to the family, who were opposed.

Montbrillant had bragged to his friend M. de Rinvillle that his theatrics were in service of him getting his way within his family so that he could leave Saint-Claude, where he was dying of boredom.<sup>34</sup> He also wrote a letter about his melancholy that he arranged for his family to receive via another friend, M. de Saint-Flour,<sup>35</sup> yet he also told Saint-Flour that he in no way meant to break off his liaisons with actresses, which had been going on during his courtship with Émilie. All this may be a joke to Montbrillant, but not to Émilie: her entire quality of life is determined by her marriage, in which she has recourse to few rights and everything depends on the goodness

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<sup>31</sup> In some respects, the language in this scene resembles that in *Julie* in the scene in which Saint-Preux, driven to distraction, spends time by himself at his favorite rock thinking of Julie.

<sup>32</sup> "Depuis quelque temps il paraissait plongé dans une mélancolie noire et se refusait constamment aux dissipationes que quelques personnes de la ville et moi nous nous efforcions de lui procurer" (1:200).

<sup>33</sup> 1:201.

<sup>34</sup> See M. de Montbrillant à M. de Rinvillle: 1:191-192.

<sup>35</sup> 1:198-200.



of her husband's heart. Instead of being married to a good man, she finds herself shackled to a manipulative dissimulator. Right before her marriage, *Émilie* begins to realize this and begs her family not to "sacrifice" her, but it is too late.

One of the women with whom *Émilie*'s husband carries on an affair, Mlle Rose, is Montbrillant's "petite poule," his "cher amour," and "Reine des cœurs" (Badinter ed., 2:102), and, although he at first denies it and ridicules *Émilie*'s suspicions, he cheats on his wife, with her knowledge, for a long time (Badinter ed., 2:715). Mlle Rose and her sister are both professional actresses. Though she acts in amateur theatricals at home, *Émilie* remains only an amateur and cannot compete with a professional actress, someone accustomed to playing different roles as needed. Likewise, *Émilie* is a poor imitator of the dissimulators around her and can never take to playing a role. Mlle Rose is a sort of foil for *Émilie*, reinforcing for the reader the extent to which the latter has remained a guileless, sincere person in spite of her experiences.

Coupled with his emotional and sexual infidelity, which leads him to contract syphilis and infect his wife, M. de Montbrillant commits financial infidelity as well, by spending the money he should be providing for his wife and children on his mistress instead. At one point, already deeply in debt, he buys Mlle Rose a house (Badinter ed., 2:564, 609), and later has another one built for both sisters on his land (Badinter ed., 3:64). He goes on to spend even more money to set up a theater school for the Rose sisters: "Cet homme insatiable de folies établit dans la maison des demoiselles Rose une école de théâtre et crut faire un acte de citoyen de ruiner ses enfans pour former à ses frais des sujets pour l'Opéra et pour la Comédie" (Badinter ed., 3:64). He is busy establishing this school at precisely the same time that *Émilie* is developing an educational program for her daughter, Pauline, showing, first, how far he is from taking an interest in his family and second, how important sincerity and authenticity are in Pauline's

curriculum. While her husband educates actors, people who are professionally trained to say whatever they need to while playing a role, Émilie raises an exceptionally sincere woman who only says what she truly thinks and feels.

Émilie's experience of marriage is a never-ending string of disappointments when her husband's many deceptions are revealed. M. de Montbrillant is such a skilled dissimulator, and Émilie so trusting, that she believes him time and again. Crushed under the weight of grief, Émilie becomes more and more open to listening to the advice of her liberated "friend," Mlle Darcy, who helps convince Émilie to take on her first extramarital lover, the gentleman Formeuse, as a consolation. Émilie genuinely loves Formeuse and hopes that, even though she will be committing adultery with him, he will serve as a sort of replacement for the ideal of a faithful husband that she was not able to find in her marriage. Perhaps, she hopes, he will be a sincere man as a counterpoint to M. de Montbrillant.

Unfortunately, another bitter disappointment follows when Émilie discovers Formeuse's dissimulation and infidelity. When Émilie asks Formeuse about some of his behavior that appears suspicious, and he makes excuses for it, Émilie accepts them. After Formeuse has been unfaithful to her for several months, Émilie is humiliated when she is the last in her circle to discover it: "Deux aventures à la fois que je viens de découvrir!" poor Émilie writes (Badinter ed., 2:396). This blow is all the more bitter in that Formeuse is sleeping with one of the Rose sisters while her own husband is sleeping with the other.

Apart from these two romantic partners – her husband and Formeuse – who cheat on her, Émilie also has heartless, traitorous friends who abuse her confidences and good nature, such as the well-known writer Desbarres. As Mlle Darcy explains, "Desbarres est de ces gens qui, ne

cherchant que le côté faible, subjuguent plus aisément par la connaissance qu'ils donnent de leur pénétration" (Badinter ed., 2:147). Émilie has taken note of Desbarres's "despotism" ["despotisme" (Badinter ed., 2:390)] after her tutor has exhorted her never to confide in this man: "[n]e vous pressez point de rien confier de ce qui vous concerne à Desbarres, je vous en prie. Je n'aime point son ton avec vous. Il y a des confidences qu'une femme ne doit jamais faire. Ne vous pressez sur rien, je vous en conjure. Vous ne savez pas combien il aime à dominer" (Badinter ed., 2:159). As the unfaltering guide for good judgment in *Montbrillant*, alongside her second lover Volx, M. de Lisieux's repeated, strongly worded warnings underscore the danger Desbarres poses to Émilie and her reputation.

Apart from Volx and M. de Lisieux, Émilie cannot rely on most of the other people around her, even those who seem to offer sound counsel. The same friend who warned her about Desbarres, Mlle Darcy, also proves to be the worst kind of traitor: she sleeps with Émilie's lover Formeuse. At first, Émilie cannot believe it is possible: "Je voulais [...] dire [...] combien mon âme était loin de soupçonner jamais ni lui ni Mlle Darcy de me trahir" (Badinter ed., 2:244), but she finally accepts that it is true (Badinter ed., 2:311) and suffers all the pain that comes with this realization: "Il s'agit d'un homme que j'adore, en qui j'ai toute mon existence, à qui j'ai tout sacrifié, et qui, pendant que j'éprouvais les tourmens les plus cruels et les plus répétés à son sujet, me trahissait avec une amie aussi perfide que lui" (Badinter ed., 2:321).

The constant repetition of examples of people preying upon Émilie and betraying her trust because she is too frank, candid, and trusting show how costly it is to be like the heroine, as well as how corrupt everyone around her is. Their repeated betrayals are so excessive as to seem ridiculous, and the vocabulary d'Épinay employs in the examples above and in those in the next paragraph – words like dominate [dominer], despotism [despotisme], chains [chaînes], harshness

[dureté], harm [nuire] - reveal the dangers of being too sensitive. At the same time, Émilie's descriptions of her pain are heart wrenching. Émilie suffers various physical ailments and depressive illnesses and even considers the convent and suicide as ways to end her torment. To explain how the victimization can be simultaneously ridiculous and heart-wrenching, I turn again to Cécile Cavallac's observation that d'Épinay is a master at moving between sentimentality and irony and does so perhaps better than any other eighteenth-century author. Émilie's dire state of affairs starts to turn around with a growing awareness of her situation, and insight into how her character has made her a target for victimization.

### Émilie's *Apprentissage* of Dissimulation

Through the suffering she endures, and with the help of M. de Lisieux and M. Volx, Émilie finally gains insight into the true nature of the people around her and of just how vulnerable she has become due to her misplaced confidences and overly trusting nature: she describes her husband's conduct as "un tissu indigne de noirceur et de fausseté !" (Badinter ed., 2:199),<sup>36</sup> and of Mlle Darcy, she says, "[c]ette fille peut me nuire" (Badinter ed., 2:474). Her tutor further enlightens her as to the mechanism by which she lets herself be victimized: "[j]'avertis Mme de Montbrillant qu'elle se laissait dominer sans s'en apercevoir. Elle se moqua d'abord de mon avis ; mais en y regardant de plus près, elle en convint, mais elle ne sentit toute la force et la dureté de ses chaînes que lorsqu'elle voulut tenter de les rompre" (Badinter ed., 2:622). Émilie begins to show signs that she is finally starting to learn how her world works, for

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<sup>36</sup> She also writes to her husband: "Si, par hasard, vous étiez sincère, ce qui n'a nulle apparence ce ne pourrait être qu'un manque de caractère" (Badinter ed., 2:140).

instance when she explains to Mme de Versel, one of Formeuse's lovers, that "... les apparences trompent" (Badinter ed., 2:479).

As she catches on, Émilie starts to make an honest appraisal of her situation and to realize that she must do something to protect herself from victimization:

Il est certain que je n'ai nul secours, nul adoucissement à espérer à mon sort, que ceux que je me procurerai moi-même. Mes parens me rendent justice au fond de leur âme, et m'abandonnent presque toujours lorsqu'il faudrait me soutenir. Et, par cette excellente politique, le coupable triomphe, et moi, pauvre vexée, je reste opprimée. Cet abaissement m'humilie et me révolte. Ma santé se détruit et je passe ma vie dans l'amertume et dans les larmes. (Badinter ed., 2:13)

Such passages in *Montbrillant* inspire pity for the heroine's suffering, by showing the extent to which her situation is desperate and extreme: she has no hope and no help; the experience "humiliates and revolts" her; she lives in "bitterness and tears." This passage also shows how necessary it is that Émilie change how she is acting. On one occasion when her husband has spent far too much on women and other entertainments, Émilie cannot hide her distress, only to have her husband mock her for showing it: "Je ne pus lui dissimuler ma peine; il en plaisanta," Émilie reports (Badinter ed., 2:437). Émilie will avoid such scenes once she learns to dissimulate actively. The equation of dissimulation and self-protection then becomes clear. Although Émilie establishes dissimulation as a vice that she finds unpardonable, writing to her tutor, "Je vous avoue que je ne pardonne point la dissimulation, même pour mon avantage" (Badinter ed., 2:476), she will learn that dissimulation is an essential means of protecting herself from falling victim to those who do not wish her well. It is one of the "survival strategies" in *Montbrillant* that Trouille evokes,<sup>37</sup> and an important one. Until she learns, Émilie reveals too many details of her life to the wrong people and suffers because of these confidences. When she starts to

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<sup>37</sup> Trouille, "La Femme Mal Mariée," 48.

understand that she must protect herself, she will dissimulate for her own advantage, many times indeed.

At first it seems difficult to excuse Émilie's blatant hypocrisy, when she says things to her lover Formeuse like, "... [S]ouvenons-nous bien que le seul crime en amitié est la réserve et la dissimulation" (Badinter ed., 2:532), and a mere two pages later, she writes to her tutor that she throws all of her efforts into hiding her silly ideas ("inconséquences") from Formeuse, while she works on destroying such defects of character (Badinter ed., 2:534). She openly admits to hiding her true thoughts and emotions, and is therefore guilty of perpetrating the crime she has just denounced against someone she dearly loves and of violating one of her most highly prized values. Once she begins to master the art of dissimulation, no one can deny that Émilie's behavior directly contradicts the precepts she has set forth for herself, but the context justifies her actions. When she hides her flaws from Formeuse, she is clearly violating her ideal. But at the same time, her desire to root out what she perceives as character flaws, in other words, to improve herself, coupled with her desperation to maintain her liaison with Formeuse, which she thinks is her only way of getting romantic love, excuses her hypocritical conduct in the reader's eyes. Émilie's horrible marriage, vividly described, in turn justifies Émilie in wanting to prolong the affair, even though it contradicts the ideal of the faithful spouse that she previously lived by. Finally, *Montbrillant* ultimately shows that Formeuse is not a worthy lover, with whom one can be oneself, in contrast to Volx.

Émilie notably shows her mastery of dissimulation in her entreaty to her father-in-law to obtain a *séparation de biens* from her husband.<sup>38</sup> First, during her interview with M. de Bernon, she keeps her liaison with Formeuse hidden, all the while using her husband's sexual commerce

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<sup>38</sup> Émilie's father-in-law is her uncle, M. de Bernon; *Montbrillant* is her cousin.

with one of the Rose sisters and especially his spending as evidence to make her case. Also, she describes the proceedings almost like a script with stage directions, including the gestures she made in order to seem more convincing, throwing herself at M. de Bernon's knees and kissing his hand: "— Vous pouvez assurer ma tranquillité, si vous le voulez, Monsieur; et c'est pour vous en offrir les moyens que je vous demande en tremblant de m'écouter; et, pour ne vous en plus parler (lui dis-je en me jetant à ses genoux et en lui baisant la main) je fais un effort sur moi-même pour vous rappeler nos malheurs" (Badinter ed., 2:26).<sup>39</sup> At this point in the story, Émilie can almost compete with the professionals.

Another notable indication of her mastery is that she is able to dissimulate during a conversation with another of Formeuse's lovers, Madame de Versel, in which the latter is unaware that Émilie is also his lover. More notably still, Émilie is also finally able to successfully dissimulate with Formeuse himself (Badinter ed., 2:487-488). Although the reader must not take his word too seriously, Émilie is at last able to manage herself so well in her marriage and in society that her husband refers to her as "une machination ambulante" (Badinter ed., 2:432). M. de Montbrillant tries to manipulate his wife in saying so, and thus readers cannot completely accept this sobriquet, but there is some fundamental truth to the idea that she has begun to master the art of dissimulation.

### The Problem with Dissimulation

D'Épinay claimed that she almost always wrote in order to be useful to others,<sup>40</sup> and indeed, Émilie's experiences can serve as a model that helps women to manage themselves in a world where dissimulation is a survival strategy. But in spite of its usefulness or even necessity,

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<sup>39</sup> There are interesting connections to be made with melodrama here.

<sup>40</sup> Badinter, *Ambition*, 164-166.

*Montbrillant* in no way endorses dissimulation as an ideal. In fact, the work exposes many of the dangers inherent in becoming a skilled dissimulator and losing some of the inborn sincerity that Émilie's character exhibits, and underscores that dissimulation is neither natural nor desirable for women.

One problem with dissimulation is that the mask risks becoming interiorized over time and deforms the wearer's character. In Émilie's case, dissimulation is a constraint that forces her to act in ways she would not act otherwise: "J'étais prête à suffoquer. Je fis un effort sur moi-même," she writes in her journal, recounting a conversation where she dissimulates with Mme de Versel, who is sleeping with Émilie's lover (Badinter ed., 2:488). "Que cette fausseté me coûte!" Émilie exclaims, thinking ahead to this woman's visit (Badinter ed., 2:451). "Tout tourne contre moi; je ne suis point faite pour la fausseté, j'ai été contrainte de feindre et j'en suis malheureuse," she writes in her journal (Badinter ed., 1:604). Such acts are not without cost to Émilie: besides moral discomfort, she suffers almost physical symptoms – being on the verge of suffocating – and, above all, dissimulating makes her unhappy. These reactions reinforce Émilie's point that she is "not made for falseness"; dissimulation goes against her nature, and when she dissimulates, she hurts herself.

Besides the cost to the individual, a second danger of dissimulation is that it reinforces the patriarchal system that keeps women divided, enemies rather than sisters, always in rivalry with one another.<sup>41</sup> *Montbrillant* is filled with examples of this process. Think, for example, of the rivalry we have just read about between Émilie and one of Formeuse's other lovers, Mme de Versel. One could argue that both women suffer because of Formeuse's infidelities, Émilie knowingly and Mme de Versel unwittingly, and they also suffer because of their jealousy of each

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<sup>41</sup> This brings to mind how Émilie must lie to her mother (Trouille, 61; Badinter, *Ambition*, 134) and how a man, Volx, reconciles mother and daughter at one point (Trouille, 65).



other. But because Émilie is constrained to dissimulate, there is never the opportunity for the two women to realize that they have nearly identical experiences and that their pain is truly caused by the system, wherein Formeuse is considered the “prize,” and they turn on each other.

Throughout the novel, d'Épinay systematically presents a checklist of all the kinds of bad situations in which women can find themselves. For the time being, I will simply cite the chorus of voices of women trapped in miserable marriages<sup>42</sup> who look for love outside of their marriages and keep it hidden from their husbands: Mme de Sally, whose husband is a tyrant (“un tyran” (Badinter ed., 2:277)) who censors her letters, keeps her locked away in the country, and does not allow her to see or communicate with her family members – not even her grandmother, Mme de Beaufort, lying on her deathbed – and Mme de Ménil, who cheats on her husband constantly and philosophizes about it, serve as examples. Almost all of the female characters find themselves in similar situations, and yet, even if there are friendships between women in *Montbrillant*, there is always an element of danger – the fear of betrayal – that divides them. For Émilie, female friendship, exemplified by her relationship with Mlle Darcy, is nothing but a great disappointment characterized by jealousy and treachery.<sup>43</sup> Thus, under the patriarchal system in which they live, women are unable to help each other, most of the time, even if individual women share many of the same experiences as their rivals.

According to Mary Trouille, it is only rarely that Émilie helps another woman in *Montbrillant*,<sup>44</sup> and yet, her experiences show the potential utility of female solidarity. When she helps another woman, it often involves two activities that d'Épinay recommends because she finds them fulfilling for women: “extramarital affairs and participation in literary and intellectual

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<sup>42</sup> Émilie has “subi le sort commun des femmes que leur mari délaisse de bonne heure,” her mother remarks (Badinter ed., 2:501).

<sup>43</sup> For more on this idea, see Trouille, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Trouille, 50.

activities.”<sup>45</sup> Trouille cites the example of *Émilie* burning letters and other documents belonging to Mme de M<sup>é</sup>nil to hide an extramarital affair (Badinter ed., 2:636) and argues that Mme de M<sup>é</sup>nil is thus able to enjoy a measure of sexual liberty.<sup>46</sup> I disagree with Trouille’s assertion that *Émilie* only rarely helps other women, because she arguably helps her mother and daughter throughout the story, and because, as we have seen, the whole work was written in the service of overhauling (women’s) education, as d’*É*pinay explicitly states in the first preface. *Émilie*’s story is told as an example to illustrate why d’*É*pinay’s proposed educational method for women is sound, and a large portion of the work is devoted to *Émilie*’s educational program for her own daughter; all of this content would be potentially of great usefulness to women. Trouille is correct, however, in observing that *Émilie* is limited in the actions she can take to help another woman directly. Yet by exposing the similarities in female experience among her contemporaries, *Émilie* points out how the system works and highlights the tragic and highly artificial divisions that exist between women as a result, as the juxtaposition of *Émilie*’s own experience with that of Mme de Grangé, illustrates.

*Émilie* and Mme de Grangé, have had a difficult relationship. Mme de Grangé, who has not had affairs, harshly criticized *Émilie* at the start of her liaison with Formeuse. *Émilie* often mentions that Mme de Grangé threatens to destroy her reputation and acts impertinently towards her (or makes “impertinens reproches” (Badinter ed., 1:738)). Later on, Mme de Grangé begins acting crazily, and *Émilie*’s brother-in-law wants to have her locked up in a convent to get rid of her, so that he can be at liberty to do as he pleases: “[il] voulait tenter les moyens de se débarrasser [d’elle]” (Badinter ed., 2:676). In spite of the enmity between herself and Mme de Grangé, *Émilie* does not support her brother-in-law, insisting rather that Mme de Grangé not be

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<sup>45</sup> Trouille, 47.

<sup>46</sup> See Trouille, 50.

sent to a convent or locked up, like another one of the madwomen in the attic Gilbert and Gubar made famous,<sup>47</sup> without having had the opportunity to tell her side of the story. Émilie thus gives a woman who was previously her enemy the opportunity to express herself: “il lui semblait indispensable d’entendre Mme de Grangé, et, cet avis l’ayant emporté, on découvrit au milieu des extravagances de cette femme un principe d’amour et de jalousie auquel le comte avait donné lieu, ce qui redoubla la pitié de sa famille pour l’état de sa femme” (Badinter ed., 2:682). Thus it comes out that Mme de Grangé’s husband is to blame for his wife’s unruly behavior. In this case, Émilie directly helps another woman by insisting that she have the same basic right that Émilie claims for herself in *Montbrillant*’s second preface, in which she bequeaths her letters to her tutor, telling him she wants to “paraître telle que je suis” and “me justifier” (Badinter ed., 1:6-8).

But d’Épinay goes further with the Mme de Grangé episode by juxtaposing it with Émilie’s own suffering to show that there is no neat distinction between the two women’s experiences.<sup>48</sup> D’Épinay strikingly juxtaposes the onset of symptoms of mental illness in Mme de Grangé with one of Émilie’s many health crises. Émilie suffers from chronic physical illnesses and what we would now term depression throughout her adult life. This time, she has fallen into a state of melancholy and despondency [“... elle était tombée dans une mélancolie et un abattement singuliers [...]”] because of the many coinciding difficult events in her life, including her husband buying a *château* for the Rose sisters (Badinter ed., 2:676-77). This juxtaposition creates solidarity, in the reader’s mind, between these two women, and it suggests

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<sup>47</sup> See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

<sup>48</sup> Here, d’Épinay resists splitting the two characters into two “types” of women. (See *The Madwoman in the Attic*.) The one problem, though, is that Formeuse has a wife who is like the madwoman in the attic. *Montbrillant* suggests, however, that Formeuse is an unworthy lover for other reasons (and this is just one more reason). The worthy lover, Volx, on the other hand, has no wife.

that all women suffer – even physically – under the patriarchal system, in which marriage is never equal. It makes them literally sick, insane. Mme de Grangé indeed suffered the same disillusionment with marriage as Émilie experienced in finding out that her husband does not love her and is not faithful (Badinter ed., 2:683). Émilie shares Mme de Grangé’s experience of heartbreak and deception at the hands of her husband many times over.

The episode of Mme de Grangé’s experience serves to justify Émilie’s adultery by showing the reader the consequences many women suffer for men’s mistreatment of them, and for men’s philandering, which reduces them all, in their eyes, to interchangeable warm bodies. It becomes understandable that Émilie would search for love outside of the morally sanctioned marriage that keeps her trapped. This episode underscores the importance of women having the opportunity to tell their stories and it provides ammunition for d’Épinay’s program of re-making marriage through sincerity. Furthermore, it suggests that sincerity would have the power to break down the barriers existing between women in a patriarchal society. Had the novel been published sooner, Émilie’s observations would have opened the door for the women readers of *Montbrillant* to take another look at their friendships with other women in a society whose structure pits them against each other, keeping them in bitter and perpetual rivalry, and to ask themselves if that is truly the way they wanted to live.<sup>49</sup> Through the experiences of Émilie,

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<sup>49</sup> Rousseau also had ideas on female friendships. In *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau presents a portrait of idealized friendships between women, in the Relationship between Julie and Claire. Saint Preux writes to Julie that in Switzerland, women “aiment assez à se rassembler entre elles” but “[à] Paris, c’est tout le contraire ; [...] Dans chaque société la maîtresse de la maison est presque toujours seule au milieu d’un cercle d’hommes” (330). Rousseau shows his misogyny when he complains about women in the public sphere, but he is right to observe that women in Paris do not have a space set apart for their exclusive use, where they can be unified and in solidarity. But there is a glimmer of hope all the same: to a limited extent, at least, literary activities give women the possibility of being able to educate their contemporaries and a new generation of women, and thus a means of resistance against the dominant ideology that wanted women to remain divided and subdued. *Montbrillant* is like a virtual salon where women are

d'Épinay suggests that inculcating sincerity was a key to solving many of the problems women faced, including their inability to speak honestly to each other about their experiences.

Montbrillant's Éloge of Sincerity: M. de Lisieux

If on the one hand *Montbrillant* shows the potential usefulness of dissimulation and the dangers of unchecked good intentions and facile confidences, it also shows how dissimulation can ultimately deform the self. Indeed, d'Épinay goes even further in her critique of dissimulation: her novel celebrates and promotes its polar opposite, sincerity, as one of the most desirable and highly prized virtues. We have seen how the combination of Émilie's contradictory education as a youth and her painful experiences in adolescence and adulthood taught her to dissimulate. We will now investigate the part of her education that trained her to be sincere and preserved those parts of her character that were naturally virtuous: her correspondence with M. de Lisieux and, in the next chapter, the diary that she kept and periodically sent to him – in which she came to know herself. We will then examine Pauline's education through which she learns how to be sincere, as well as Émilie's continuing education in sincerity. Specifically, we will read Émilie's journal and Pauline's daily self-appraisal as remakes of the Catholic *examen*, Émilie's daily plan for Pauline as a secular rule, and M. de Lisieux and M. Volx as secular spiritual directors.

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assembled to talk to the reader about their experiences in a frank and honest manner. Ultimately, because d'Épinay denounces the falseness of life in society and shows the near universality of the experiences of married women of her social standing, she makes a compelling case for her vision of an ideal education for women based on sincerity. Women educated in such a way might in theory be able to take the sincere expression of their thoughts from the virtual space to the real public sphere.

As she grows up, Émilie's on-paper interactions with M. de Lisieux act as a counterweight to the education in dissimulation that she receives from society at large, notably from her female relatives, her early spiritual director, and the "professional" dissimulators in her intimate social group who teach Émilie the value of dissimulation as a means of self-preservation. Part of Émilie's education is learning whom she can safely trust. Her relationship with M. de Lisieux provides an example of an ideal relationship where both parties can be completely sincere with each other, without fear. M. de Lisieux listens to Émilie's confessions in a disinterested way and gives her wise, reliable counsel, which helps Émilie conduct herself better in society and avoid victimization.<sup>50</sup> There is no perfidy on his part, so Émilie can write to him free of all constraints, except for those she imposes on herself out of a sense of shame, and even when she temporarily suppresses information, Émilie always ends up revealing the truth eventually. It is as if there is almost complete transparency between M. de Lisieux and Émilie, to use Starobinski's term.<sup>51</sup> It is M. de Lisieux who serves as narrator in *Montbrillant*, at least in the version of the novel d'Épinay left behind at her death. Lisieux tells the reader that after Émilie's death, he has read and compiled all of her correspondence. He presents her letters and journal entries to the reader from the position of someone who now knows every intimate detail of Émilie's life that she committed to paper, and who can also fill in missing pieces.

The education in how to write that Émilie gets from her correspondence with M. de Lisieux undoes the mis-education Émilie has received at the hands of the priest who wanted to take advantage of her confidence and the women in her family, who have taught her to use phrases and formulas designed to please. In contrast, M. de Lisieux encourages Émilie to write to

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<sup>50</sup> It is interesting that M. de Lisieux represents something like René's ideal of the disinterested tutor. For d'Épinay, M. de Lisieux, is an exemplary teacher, and yet, a parent would still be better.

<sup>51</sup> See *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et l'obstacle*.

him often, not just letters, but also the diary, and advises her always to be herself when she writes to him, as we have seen. Although he tells Émilie to write in her own voice in her letters to him, M. de Lisieux warns Émilie against too much frankness and to watch what she says when she first starts getting to know Desbarres and Mme Médéric, acquaintances that signal her entry into a more salon-based social group. She will have to learn to operate prudently in the salons, a world that requires a finer sense of what to say and when to self-censor in order to avoid trouble (Badinter ed., 2:111).<sup>52</sup> At the same time, M. de Lisieux instructs Émilie that much would be lost if she were to adopt the salon mode of expression as her exclusive way to speak and write: “Les soi-disans bons mots y sont très fréquens; mais les mots vraiment bons, dénués d’*épigrammes* et remarquables par la force de la pensée et par celles qu’elle font naître, sont si rares que je n’en ai pas entendu un seul qui méritât d’être retenu ni cité” (Badinter ed., 2:120). The salon register is, like those her aunt and mother taught her to use with her social betters and inferiors, simply one of several registers that Émilie must master over the course of her lifetime in order to rise in society and to find fulfillment, but without letting any of those instrumental modes of expression usurp the place given to her own.<sup>53</sup> Until she nears the end of her life, Émilie often feels constrained to dissimulate by her social milieu or circumstances. Her correspondence with M. de Lisieux is one of the only places she can be herself until she starts educating her daughter and until she meets Volx.<sup>54</sup>

### Results of Émilie’s Education

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<sup>52</sup> “...un monde qui exigeait plus d’usage, et peut-être même moins de franchise qu’elle [Émilie] en avait pour y paraître souvent sans inconvénient.”

<sup>53</sup> D’Épinay herself shows a fine mastery of this art of switching between multiple registers in *Montbrillant*, as Cavillac observes (896).

<sup>54</sup> M. de Lisieux writes to Émilie: “Vos récits sont charmans, ma chère Émilie, et rien ne me prouve mieux ce que je vous ai dit mille fois: soyez vous, et vous serez bien” (1:103).

As we have seen, Émilie's education was multivalent; she was exposed to a mix of influences including positive ones like the kindly governess who agreed to teach her alongside her cousin and M. de Lisieux, and negative influences like Émilie's female relatives who suppressed the young girl's voice and the crooked priest who tried to gain control of her family's money through abuse of her confidence. M. de Lisieux's messages about the importance of sincerity were in some ways diluted or counterbalanced by the voices encouraging dissimulation, and the results of Émilie's education are therefore mixed.

Émilie enters adulthood so unsure of herself and so paralyzed by fear of doing or saying the wrong thing that she can hardly act at all, let alone act on any of her convictions. And, as we have seen, Émilie's female relatives have worked against M. de Lisieux to discourage Émilie from thinking for herself and developing her own convictions, because her family intended for Émilie to please everyone else without a thought given to herself. We see the outcome of Émilie's education as we recall René's words describing her as someone who has good intentions but who is ultimately not self-consistent, words that d'Épinay recycled from her own self-portrait: "[...] toutes vos actions étant incertaines et contradictoires, soit entre elles, soit avec vos paroles, la peur surtout que vous avez d'offenser ou de blesser les autres, tout cela vous fait passer pour fausse et pour être sans caractère" (Badinter ed., 2:571). We hear an echo of this language in *Montbrillant's* first preface, which warns about the dangers of a "timide et incertaine" education that can so deform a person's character that she is unable to pursue the truth and be sincere with strength: "[c]elle qu'avait reçue Mme de Montbrillant avait si bien déguisé ou affaibli ses dispositions naturelles qu'il a fallu un nombre d'années passé dans le malheur pour lui rendre la fermeté de son caractère" (1:4). We hear another echo when Émilie criticizes her son's education as "contradictoire et incertaine" and "en cela, médiocre" (2:608).



Émilie elsewhere appeals to women to learn from her example after listing and lamenting all of the mistakes she had made, even though she was well intentioned, due to the defects of her character that stem from her education (Badinter ed., 2:800). Here we come back to the idea of nature, of a moral compass and how human beings have blinded themselves to the truth with which nature intended them to be in contact and have become alienated from themselves, unable to read their moral compasses. The right kind of education, however, can put a person like Émilie back in touch with the truth and her means of perceiving it and can form a person like Pauline so that she never loses her bearings, hence “la nécessité d’étudier la caractère d’un enfant pour former d’après cette connaissance un plan d’éducation invariable” (1:4).

Though Émilie finally emerges as a more confident person who is able to act on her beliefs, especially when it comes to protecting her children financially and educating them, it takes her a great deal of time and heartache to reach this point. As Émilie puts it in the work’s second preface, “Je l’ai trouvé enfin, le bonheur qui jusqu’à présent m’avait fui (*sic*)! Mais qu’il m’a coûté, et quels efforts il m’a fallu faire sur moi-même pour y réussir!” (1:7) Although her husband bears most of the blame, and although Émilie’s attitude may strike modern ears as a self-loathing, victim-blaming expression of internalized oppression, Émilie also blames much of the unhappiness and abuse she suffers in her marriage on personal faults resulting from her flawed education. Émilie believes that if her daughter were to be raised differently, she would not have her mother’s uncertainty and character defects. One result would be that Pauline would be free to choose a different kind of mate (among the limited options she would have) and that she would have a wholly different kind of marriage than her mother’s, one based not on inequality and abuse but rather on love and respect.

In educating her daughter, Émilie seems to distill the best part of her own education – her letters to and from M. de Lisieux – and his insight that developing her capacity for sincere self-expression was the highest good. Émilie refines and expands upon these principles, which then form the basis of Pauline’s curriculum. Instead of subjecting her daughter to a mix of diverse influences, some good and some bad like those to which Émilie herself was exposed, Émilie will see to it that Pauline receives a concentrated dose of her mother’s philosophy and that Pauline practices a method of self-appraisal that will put her in touch with her inner compass and will lead her to be fundamentally sincere.

Chapter Seven: How *Montbrillant* Co-opts Forms of Catholic Spirituality to Teach Sincerity  
Contemplation and Self-Examination

In this section, we will examine how *Émilie* takes the Catholic structures of a rule and the *examen* and uses them in a secular context to instill values, and above all sincerity, in her daughter. This program teaches Pauline to identify what she thinks and feels in order to develop her capacity for reason and her moral substance.

D'Épinay returns to the rule or daily schedule three times in *Montbrillant*, and it is one of the important structuring elements of the work. The first two rules, both worthless, are furnished by the corrupt priest *Émilie* has as a spiritual director in adolescence, Le Père \*\*\*, and by *Émilie*'s son's *précepteur*. The third is *Émilie*'s schedule for Pauline. The merits of the latter become clear when juxtaposed with the first two.

When *Émilie* is thirteen and has recently come out of the convent, Le Père \*\*\* sends her a schedule to follow, which he refers to by the term rule, “la règle et la distribution de vos heures” (1:56). In the letter containing this rule and Le Père \*\*\*'s letter immediately preceding it, readers learn that Le Père \*\*\* is a hypocrite. He begins by explaining to *Émilie* that he does not have a lot of time for her – he cannot come see her – because he has to write a sermon. It will be an onerous task because “[i]l faut parler à des gens à qui il faut dire la vérité, et ne leur pas déplaire. Je m’y exposerai néanmoins sans crainte, si je n’avais à me conserver pour mon cher troupeau dont vous faites partie, lequel a de moi un besoin journalier et instant” (1:56). The priest admits he will not tell the truth, but excuses himself owing to the need for self-preservation so that he can continue to serve his flock, who need him, even though he apparently does not have time for them. We can see in d'Épinay's caricature of the priest a biting critique of Jesuit casuistry. And again we see the dangers of trying to please everyone. The priest continues by

encouraging *Émilie* to be patient and submit to her elders, and especially, to work on her relationship with her cruel aunt de Bernon: “[p]our Madame votre tante, ménagez-la en vue de Dieu. Elle est riche; et si une fois vous pouviez lui plaire, que savez-vous si elle ne vous mettrait pas en état de faire des aumônes un peu plus fréquentes ?” (1:56) It is only after exposing this self-serving profit motive that the priest makes appeals to “le seul principe d’humilité” and *Émilie*’s “salut” when it comes to dealing with her aunt.

He goes on to encourage *Émilie* to consult him alone in all matters. He tries to isolate her from other members of her family who, in contrast to her aunt de Bernon, show her love, affection, and interest. He warns her away from her cousin Mlle de Beaufort, who is, according to him, “trop élevée dans les principes et les erreurs du monde,” and from her great-aunt Mme de Beaufort, who, he says, has “une sorte de revêcherie qu’on appelle dans le monde fierté, qui laisse l’âme dans une disposition épineuse qui la fait se révolter de tout et qui détruit en elle cette simplicité humble et cette soumission sans lesquelles saint Paul et Dieu lui-même dit qu’on n’entre point au Royaume des Cieux” (1:56-57). Although Mme de Beaufort is caricatured, readers know that a dose of this very “fierté” – a profoundly aristocratic trait – is perhaps precisely what *Émilie* needs once she reaches adulthood and everyone takes advantage of her. Of course, if *Émilie* learns to think for herself and take a strong stand in favor of her positions, the priest will have no chance to manipulate her.

In the rule itself, the priest states that *Émilie* will rise at 6 a.m. and will start her day in prayer. Afterward, she should turn her attention to her appearance, and we see the same type of casuistry at work again. Normally, *Émilie* should not spend too long on her appearance, but it is all right if *Émilie* spends an exorbitant amount of time on it if she is simply obeying her family’s mandates relating to the “vues,” such as marriage prospects, that they may have in mind for her

(1:59). In the priest's words, we hear an echo of the early letter from Émilie to Mme de Sally, in which Émilie complains that young women are taught that they must not be seen to be trying to attract the eyes of men, when in fact they are also taught that this is all that matters. Émilie finds the hypocrisy of this position repugnant.

The priest displays the same kind of thinking in describing how Émilie is to fill the two hours following her *toilette*. These hours are for reading and prayer. In terms of reading material, Émilie must defer to M. de Lisieux and, curiously, to Mme de Beaufort (whom the priest had recently discouraged Émilie from seeing). But Émilie cannot read just anything:

A Dieu ne plaise que je vous conseille la lecture des romans ni d'autres livres mondains; mais je ne vous défends pas d'en parler avec ceux qui ont l'imprudence de les lire. Vous apprendrez par là le danger dont ils peuvent être; cela vous fortifiera en même temps contre la tentation de faire de ces sortes de lectures et vous laissera néanmoins au courant des conversations qui ne sont malheureusement que trop fréquentes dans un monde où votre vocation vous appelle et vous retient. (1:59)

The priest's stance on novels is equivocal: as a *dévote*, Émilie should not read them, but she should listen in on conversations about them and thereby learn what is in them. By extension, this *démarche* encourages Émilie to comment on books she has not read and knows nothing about outside of the opinions of others.<sup>1</sup> D'Épinay instead subscribed to the views of Sévigné, who thought that her young granddaughter should read widely, including novels, because there would be little danger in them for a woman already in possession of a strong moral foundation.

The priest explains that when Émilie has "difficultés qui naissent en matière de foi," she must consult only him, but when she has questions regarding "la vie et les mœurs," he advises her that the resolution of such problems "doit se prendre des usages de ceux avec qui l'on vit" (1:59). Although he does not explicitly explain how Émilie is to manage if questions of faith

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<sup>1</sup> See Weinreb, *Eagle*, 53.

should inconveniently conflict with the mandates of her life in the world, he shows her excellent examples of how to excuse any conduct that would trouble a sincerely religious soul.

For the moments of free time that *Émilie* finds during the day, the priest recommends “[I]’étude des sciences et des arts,” and “les arts agréables surtout, comme la musique, le dessin, peut (*sic*) vous être très utile” (1:59). These are some of the conventional ways aristocratic women were to spend their time, and the development of these arts could be an important part of strategies to attract a husband. The priest waxes pious on the reasons *Émilie* must spend her time on these pursuits: “Dieu vous a donné des dispositions à ces talents; vous seriez coupable de n’en pas faire usage” (1:59). He goes on to explain that no one knows God’s plans for her and that a person must always put her talents to good use in every free moment for the greater glory of God, lest she be surprised by the second coming.

Every morning, *Émilie* must pay a visit to her aunt and attempt to curry her favor. The priest provides a flowery religious justification, but readers already know his first priority is *Mme de Bernon*’s wealth. The priest also instructs *Émilie* on how she can serve as an example to her young cousins, although she must do so subtly, without “s’ériger en pédante” (1:60). We see the profit motive return again in this context, because the priest advises that if *Émilie* can succeed in bringing about the reform of two of her cousins, then “s’ils sont bien nés, ils chercheront alors à vous le marquer” (1:60).

The priest instructs *Émilie* that she should begin to meditate 15 minutes every day. In order to learn how to meditate, *Émilie* should think about things of this world: “pour ne pas vous rebuter d’abord par la difficulté d’une pratique qui doit vous mener par degrés aux plus sublimes consolations, occupez-vous d’abord des choses que vous aurez entendu dire ou que vous aurez vues dans le courant de la journée et qui vous auront paru être dignes d’être remarquées” (1:60).

He may be encouraging Émilie to develop a serious spiritual practice, but the priest uses the *apprentissage* of meditation as a pretext to spy on Émilie's family, as she must then painstakingly report to him everything that happens, becoming his eyes and ears within her family, and his instructions to her will make her the agent of his will in her dealing with her family members:

Pour vous mettre à portée de tirer parti de tout pour notre salut, je voudrais que [vous] vous assujettissiez à mettre par écrit chaque jour tout ce que vous entendez dire. Vous m'enverriez ce journal deux fois la semaine ; j'y noterai les articles sur lesquels vous devez porter vos réflexions et je vous indiquerai les moyens de les commenter avec fruit. Il serait à désirer que votre mémoire vous servît assez bien pour placer à chaque article les noms de ceux dont vous écrivez les propos. Je serais par ce moyen plus en état de diriger votre opinion et votre estime, et j'évitais moi-même l'écueil des faux jugemens, car tel propos peut être édifiant ou répréhensible suivant la personne qui le tient. (1:60-61)

The priest justifies this with a veneer of piety and a lot of empty religious verbiage. In this episode, d'Épinay provides an illustration of the kind of rootless Catholic spirituality, devoid of real, deep meaning that people are so quick to abandon, the kind of empty faith that d'Épinay and Grimm were fighting against in developing a new kind of education that would instill a secular version of sincerity first by teaching people to calibrate their moral compass to the truth, which would then lead them to the true religion.<sup>2</sup> D'Épinay takes the practice of thinking about one's day-to-day activities and puts it to better use.

The priest also provides some counsel on how Émilie is to handle conversations. He says that it is difficult to give her specific rules to follow in this arena and again launches into casuistry. If she hears something that goes against her principles, she must imagine that the speaker has secret motives that are honest (1:61). A Christian with deep convictions would

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<sup>2</sup> Because of her anti-clerical positions, we might be tempted to think that d'Épinay is perhaps an atheist. While Émilie moves away from devotion, *Montbrillant's* overall message is one that promotes deism, not atheism.

probably speak what she saw as the truth when confronted with discourse contrary to her principles, but the priest does not encourage that. In fact, the priest recommends that *Émilie* read so that she can embellish her conversation and only preach indirectly: “Lisez, ornez votre esprit, afin que votre conversation s’en ressente, et par des citations ingénieuses et honnêtes acquérez le talent précieux d’instruire en amusant” (1:61). *Émilie* must not be forthright in her speech, and must do everything in “secret.” Above all, she must not consult anyone other than her spiritual director for guidance (1:61). However, for *Sévigné* as for *d’Épinay* after her, the point of conversation in a young woman’s schedule would be for her to learn how to think and express herself clearly, rather than to profit from what she hears in secret, to communicate indirectly, and to defer constantly to others.

Although most *dévotés* would not approve of going to the theater, the priest feels that this is an acceptable way for *Émilie* to pass the time in the evenings:

Si vous vous trouviez forcée par quelque cas extraordinaire d’assister aux spectacles en la compagnie de Madame votre mère ou de Mesdames vos tantes, que ce soit purement en esprit d’obéissance et en détachant votre cœur de l’attrait qui pourrait vous y conduire. Alors vous satisferez au commandement de Dieu en exécutant intérieurement ce qu’il ordonne. Au reste, le mal qui se trouve en ces choses temporelles est si mince et de si peu de conséquence pour le Ciel qu’il n’est de nulle considération devant Dieu, ni devant les saints. (1:61-62)

In the priest’s comments on the theater, we see an especially good example of *d’Épinay*’s use of caricature to ridicule one of her characters, in this case in the accumulation of the different types of justifications: if *Émilie* goes to the theater, she must obey but must not enjoy it, and then she will be all right, but all the same neither God nor the saints really care. (The priest, it is presumed, would know.)

In sum, the priest would have *Émilie* spend her day very little troubled by religious concerns, although she would give the outward appearance of praying, meditating, and



consulting her spiritual director. She would work to cultivate relationships with people who could support the Church financially. She would work on her *talens agréables* in order to increase her odds of marrying a wealthy man. Émilie would be taught not to trust her own instincts on anything. She would need to consult the priest before doing anything. She would never need to develop her own capacity for judgment of others, or her discernment for whom to trust, because the priest would make those decisions for her. Émilie's rule, as we will see, is the inverse of all of this.

Before examining the other two rules, we will first compare M. de Lisieux's journal with the journal the priest asks Émilie to keep.

#### M. de Lisieux's Journal

Once Émilie is married and has begun to suffer the slings and arrows of her husband's mistreatment, for a while she is unable to see her husband's true character. Thus, when he shows her the slightest kindness, she begins to hope that her marriage will change. M. de Lisieux writes to warn her against getting her hopes up: "Vous vous livrez à des espérances de bonheur dont j'ose vous dire que vous devez défier. Ce n'est pas que je veuille rien ôter à vos plaisirs. Je suis votre ami, je le serai toujours; mais plus je vous suis attaché, et plus je voudrais rendre votre bonheur solide et durable. Pour y parvenir, peut-être faudrait-il tâcher d'apprécier les choses à leur juste valeur" (1:333-334). He compares her present happiness to a recent letter in which she despaired over her husband's behavior and asks her: "Comparez ces deux positions de votre âme, si voisines l'une de l'autre, et si opposée[s]; votre manière de les envisager n'en fait-elle pas toute la stabilité? Le bonheur ou le malheur n'existe-t-il donc pas que par des illusions? N'y a-t-il pas un égal danger à ne rien voir que par l'œil de la passion?" (1:334) In this passage, the "two

positions of the soul” bring to mind the image of an inner moral compass with a hand that can point to different positions and the idea of distances between the positions that can be measured. M. de Lisieux warns Émilie that her husband is still in “l’âge des passions” and has seen very little of the world, that he will therefore have more wild oats to sow, and that she is still young and has seen but “une très petite partie des peines, des plaisirs, du bonheur et des vicissitudes auxquelles vous pouvez être exposée” (1:334). He reminds her that she has just been through a “storm” and that she should take precautions so that she will be “moins tourmentée” when the next one comes. He flatly tells her that she will not be able to fix her husband by her side, nor “lui tenir lieu de tout” (1:334).

What M. de Lisieux recommends to help Émilie in this regard is that she come to know herself much better, and the means to achieve this goal is the journal. By keeping one, Émilie will learn to trace the positions of her inner compass over time:

Je voudrais que vous puissiez vous voir telle que vous avez été, il n’y a pas longtemps, telle que vous êtes aujourd’hui, et telle que vous serez peut-être dans un ou deux mois. J’aimerais que la suite de ces différentes positions se présentât tout d’un coup à votre esprit ; alors vous verriez les changemens marqués de cet heureux caractère avec lequel vous êtes née, combien les circonstances étrangères influent sur votre âme, sur les jugemens qu’elle porte, et sur toutes vos affections. (1:334)

She will then be able to become her own “guide”; “vous trouveriez en vous un ami sûr et sévère,” Lisieux promises. Lisieux’s words remind us of the priest’s request that Émilie write him an account of everything she sees and hears: “Auriez-vous le temps de vous faire un détail de ce que vous voyez, de ce que vous entendez, de ce que vous pensez surtout, et de la manière dont vous affectez des choses ?” Lisieux asks. However, the priest did not care what she thinks and feels about what she sees and hears, whereas what she thinks, and especially, how she responds emotionally, are much more important to M. de Lisieux. Whereas the priest wanted to keep Émilie completely dependent on him for life, M. de Lisieux wants Émilie to develop as an

autonomous individual. He is her guide, but under his guidance, she will grow, develop her virtues, and evolve, whereas with the priest she would not. Whereas the priest teaches Émilie about outward appearances and the importance of always conforming to society's expectations for her and pleasing her family, regardless of her own scruples, M. de Lisieux teaches Émilie to listen to her inner still small voice, to look inward first, and to determine her outward conduct based on what she inwardly knows is right. The process of looking inward will prepare her to act fully as an individual in the world, rather than as a marionette whose strings are pulled by other people. It will prepare her to see herself as something other than a plaything whose purpose in life is to please other people. It will teach her to be a person herself who has something other than pleasing to live for, to be more like a man than like Rousseau's Sophie.

“Pourriez-vous craindre de vous voir, si cet examen doit vous aider à embellir votre existence?” M. de Lisieux asks (1:335), suggesting that perhaps examining herself will be difficult work, but ultimately worth it, as it is, perhaps, the most important thing she can do to change the circumstances of her life. Lisieux uses the word “examen” to refer to this difficult work (and Émilie's journal writing), an echo of the Catholic examination of conscience, and a word that d'Épinay will use again in the context of Émilie's curriculum for Pauline. Though the priest does not teach Émilie anything that would truly lead to spiritual growth, the journal-writing exercise that Lisieux prescribes takes its place.

M. de Lisieux claims that “[c]e n'est pas comme tuteur sévère, c'est comme homme qui connaît le monde et comme votre ami que j'ose vous rappeler à vous même” (1:335), and it is as a kind of secular spiritual director that he offers his advice to Émilie. Whereas the priest only cares about his own self-interest, does not even have the time to come see Émilie, and does not truly care about her inner life, M. de Lisieux cares about Émilie's best interests and takes a deep

interest in her development as an individual. Lisieux is truly the model of the disinterested tutor. While he is an exemplary teacher and gives Émilie gifts of self-development she does not get from anyone else in her life, for Émilie, the ideal is that a child's parent would be able to fill this role.

### M. Balbi's Rule for Émilie's Son

Émilie is disappointed in the education her son is receiving in a *collège*, where he attends some classes and spends his time under the supervision of his personal *précepteur*, M. Balbi, who provides *Montbrillant's* second rule. She therefore brings along the well-known author M. Desbarres as a kind of consultant to observe what goes on at the school and how M. Balbi organizes her son's day. Desbarres does not approve of what he sees, and by involving him, Émilie is finally able to get her husband to agree at least to remove her son from the *collège*. Although Balbi will still teach him, Émilie will have somewhat more control of his education when her son is under her own roof.

Desbarres' and Émilie's visit to the *collège* has an inauspicious beginning. When they arrive, Balbi is relaxing, stretched out on a sofa, his feet on a footrest, no wig on his head. Meanwhile, Émilie's son draws "des croix et des pâtés" in a notebook, "faute de rien trouver dans sa tête de ce qu'il y devait écrire" (2:306). M. Balbi explains that it is the third day the child has been asked to work on the same Latin translation, which Desbarres judges to be too difficult (2:306). Readers can imagine that Émilie's son has spent three days learning nothing but drawing lots of crosses, while Balbi has lounged and not intervened or provided a more suitable assignment, a striking image of a wasted education and a useless teacher.

Desbarres then asks Balbi to explain “votre plan, l’ordre de votre journée” (2:307). Balbi explains that they rise at 6 a.m. and say their prayers for 15 minutes. Desbarres objects that this is far too long, as the young boy will have no idea what the words of the prayers actually mean; Émilie is not concerned about it: “Ce que je trouve de bon à ce quart d’heure,” she says, “c’est que c’est toujours un temps employé à réfléchir” (2:307). Continuing his interrogation, Desbarres then discovers that financial circumstances led Balbi to become an ecclesiastic, and that he is interested in literature, and that is why he works as an educator. He likes writing verses (2:307). Neither being a priest nor teaching is particularly interesting to him, in contrast to Lisieux, who takes great interest and care in Émilie’s education.

After prayers, “la toilette, le déjeuner,” the young boy spends two hours in class (2:308). He is explicating a Latin work, the *Selectae*, is studying geography with the aid of the *Géographie avec le secours de vers artificiels* by the priest R. P. Buffier, and is reading the *Imitation de Jésus-Christ* and, “une fois par semaine, la *Henriade* de Voltaire” (2:308). Émilie tells Balbi that she sees no point to any of that, and Desbarres chimes in with a critique of the amount of devotion included and the study of Latin and Greek, which the boy will never use, or else that will turn him into a *savant* and an object of ridicule (2:308-309). Desbarres says that instead, the boy’s education should be filled with “[b]eaucoup de mœurs, de morale” (2:309). Émilie stresses that her son must be taught, above all, how to treat his fellow man (“apprenez-lui à aimer ses semblables, à leur être utile, et à s’en faire aimer”), which leads Balbi to concede that her son would be better off at home with her, where he could receive an individualized education meant to do this, than in the school (2:309).

Desbarres offers some recommendations on how the boy should spend his day: he should learn to write and speak well, in French because he is a Frenchman and that is his language. He

should learn “[u]n peu d’histoire, un peu de géographie,” but only through conversation while looking at the map. The boy is too young for anything more. Desbarres recommends counting, calculating, geometry, and measuring, because they are practical, (but he also believes geometry “tient l’esprit droit” (2:309)). I read this as a reference to masonic ideals, according to which the attainment of moral perfection is the outcome of a kind of quest in which a person passes through different stages of enlightenment. Surrounded by the freemasons like Diderot and Mozart, d’Épinay was steeped in a common set of ideals regarding personal perfectibility. Although *Montbrillant* contains only an allusion to Masonic activity, rather than featuring the barrage of Masonic symbols that we find in some other eighteenth-century educational works like *Sethos, histoire, ou Vie tirée des monumens, anecdotes de l’ancienne Égypte, traduite d’un manuscrit grec* by the *abbé* Jean Terrasson,<sup>3</sup> her heroine’s quest for greater self-knowledge, virtue, and truth resembles, in several respects, the structure of Masonic works.

Upon hearing Émilie and Desbarres’ recommendations, Balbi objects that there is more work for him than for Émilie’s son in such an educational program (2:310), an echo of the same warning d’Épinay gave to her daughter’s governess in the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*. Balbi exclaims that in order to execute this kind of education, “Il faut réformer et refondre [...] un caractère,” which Desbarres thinks is patently absurd and tells him “Non, Monsieur, non ; il faut tirer tout le parti possible du caractère que la nature lui a donné” (2:310). Otherwise the child will become a hypocrite who hides his true nature. D’Épinay expressed the same viewpoint in a letter to Tronchin: modification is possible, but not wholesale change.<sup>4</sup>

Desbarres and Émilie want to know if the boy is a liar. Balbi says no, “Jamais, [...], que pour s’excuser” (2:310). Desbarres and Émilie then stress that such lies are Balbi’s fault for

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<sup>3</sup> For analysis of the symbolism and structure of *Sethos*, see Grandroute 1:301-390.

<sup>4</sup> See *Moments*, 118-127.

putting the boy in a position to lie and that Balbi must never give her son any reason to disguise the truth, a concept the teacher has trouble grasping: “Nous eûmes un peu de peine à nous faire entendre de Balbi, qui ne concevait pas qu’il valait mieux ignorer une faute et la laisser impunie, plutôt que de mettre l’enfant dans le cas de la défendre ou de la nier par un mensonge” (2:310). This emphasis on telling the truth is one facet of d’Épinay’s emphasis on sincerity.

Desbarres and Émilie ask if the boy is lazy. Oh yes! says Balbi. They then tell him his bad example is to blame and remind him that they found him lying on a couch. They tell him he must never appear like that again in front of the boy if he wants to get results from him. Again, we see the importance of teaching by example.

The three discuss various other aspects of the boy’s education, including that he must develop “honest passions” (2:311-312), that he must be told the reason why he is being asked to do things, “parce qu’il ne faut pas mener les enfans comme des bêtes et qu’il faut les accoutumer à mettre de l’importance et de l’intérêt à tout ce qu’ils font, et surtout à leurs devoirs,” that he must learn things through his senses and through experience (2:312). Desbarres explains that the boy must be taught the value of money, and that the important thing is the use one makes of it (2:313). Balbi complains that he has all the difficulty in the world teaching his pupil to be polite, which elicits quite a reaction:

“De la politesse, de la politesse? dit Desbarres. J’aime mieux qu’il ait le courage d’être vrai, au hasard de passer pour un brutal, comme moi. Dans un pays comme celui-ci, la politesse est une petite monnaie courante dont tout le monde a ses poches pleines, et qui ne rend pas plus riche. – Mais, Monsieur, dit innocemment Balbi, si on se disait toujours mutuellement ce qu’on pense, il y a nombre de gens qui ne se souffriraient pas. – Alors, Monsieur, il n’y a qu’à se taire; tant pire pour ceux dont le silence blesse l’amour-propre ! (2:312-313)

Desbarres indeed acts like Molière's Misanthrope throughout his appearances in *Montbrillant*, and though he represents an extrême case, Émilie mentions that she, too, sometimes acts the same way (2:313). Indeed, as she grows in moral courage, she becomes increasingly sincere.

After this visit to the school, Émilie gains a greater measure of control over her son's education. Although Balbi remains his teacher, they at least come to live with Émilie, and she can start to repair some of the damage done to her son by the inadequate education he has received.

### Émilie's Rule for Pauline

In a letter to Pauline's governess, Mlle Durand, Émilie shares her thoughts on her daughter's education and stresses that such an important and complex matter is not the stuff of one letter only, and that she and the governess will have many conversations about Pauline's progress. The letter merely provides "quelques règles générales," and the two women will have to consult one another to discuss "les cas particuliers" (1:31). This letter is based on the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, albeit with some differences.

D'Épinay provides a daily schedule for her daughter, who will rise early and say a quick prayer. Her *toilette* must be accomplished as quickly as possible and thought of as "une sujétion nécessaire" that must not include any opportunities for amusement (1:31). Pauline will then read her catechism, an explanation of the Epistle and the Gospel readings, or another "morceau de morale chrétienne" for half an hour (1:31). She must be allowed to interrupt as often as she wants, "si c'est par des questions ou des observations relatives à la lecture" (1:32).

Before the midday meal, the young girl and the governess must take a one-to-two-hour walk, if weather allows, during which the governess must try to excite the young girl's curiosity



and teach her through conversation and reason (1:32-33). She should inspire her admiration for the beauties of nature, “à voir travailler les insectes, par exemple” because “les petites choses sont plus à la portée des enfants” and because such objects of study are “si dignes d’être admirés et si négligés dans l’éducation ordinaire” (1:32). The young girl must learn to be “sensible au plaisir” that can come from helping a suffering animal, and she will do this by imagining herself in that animal’s shoes (so to speak) and the joy she would feel “d’être soulagée dans la peine” (1:32-33). By these means, she will come to know “le bonheur d’être sensible et compatissante. C’est le chemin à la vertu et à l’humanité” (1:33).

Another key lesson is that no good action is without its reward, but that “la plus agréable et la plus douce de toutes est la satisfaction qu’on éprouve d’avoir bien fait” (1:33). D’Épinay explains how the young girl must be praised in such a way as will reinforce this lesson: let 10 mistakes go for one of these good actions (1:33). On the other hand, at the first sign of any antisocial tendencies – “quand elle aura marqué de la cruauté, ou de l’insensibilité, ou quelque penchant qui à la longue pourrait dégénérer en vice” – she must be punished proportionally as well (1:33).

If the weather does not allow a walk, the young girl must be given handiwork “convenable à son sexe, broderie, linge, etc.” (1:33). She must always have a choice of several projects so that she gets used to doing this kind of work without becoming bored with it. After their *dîner*, and until four or five in the afternoon, the young girl will be at her mother and grandmother’s side (1:33). Mlle Durand must show Pauline by example how she should treat her elders. When the governess resumes her duties, they will study history and geography through the telling of “les principaux événements d’un règne,” without making Pauline memorize (1:33). At the same time the next day, the governess will ask her to recount what she remembers

learning the day before. If she remembers nothing, Mlle Durand will go over the lesson again and ask Pauline to repeat it immediately, while it is still fresh (1:33-34). Émilie believes that Pauline will learn more from conversation than from rote memorization. She can work on her handiwork during these discussions (1:34).

Because Pauline should exercise her memory at some point, Émilie advises that Pauline can learn some “morceaux de poésie ou de prose agréables” that she will be capable of understanding – no fairy tales because they are not realistic, and no La Fontaine, because she is too young to understand it.

Every evening, Pauline must make “un examen moral et exact de tout ce qu’elle aura fait dans la journée,” and the governess should do this with her so that the girl gets used to it and learns to derive benefits from the practice. She must be in bed, at the latest, by ten (1:34). Every activity must have a designated time of day, and it must not vary from day to day. Durand must allow double the time necessary for each activity so that Pauline has adequate time to ask questions, and some time must be devoted to writing (1:34).

In a general sense, d’Épinay does not want the governess to punish or reprimand her daughter for faults that “la raison, l’usage du monde et l’envie de plaire corrigent avec le temps,” such as problems with her countenance and her “mauvaise grâce” (1:34). A gentle word in private will suffice, and by age 15, she will know how to behave herself in any case. For those faults, on the other hand, that “pourraient faire craindre pour son caractère et pour son bonheur,” the governess must use reasoning (appropriate to the girl’s age) to explain to her “combien il est humiliant et dangereux pour une fille bien née de se trouver dans une pareille situation” (1:35). Nonetheless, she will undoubtedly repeat the same conduct at a later time. Then, if other people are present, the governess must simply give her a look and wait until they are alone, and then, the

governess must show that she is deeply saddened. The governess must make the girl ask several times before revealing the reason why, in a serious (but not dry) tone: that, among other things, her conduct pained all those present, that her “défaut” is capable of corrupting her heart and erasing all the good that is in her, “qu’elle laisse sans fruit les germes de vertu qui sont en elle,” while her mother and governess are giving her the means to cultivate them (1:35). This kind of correction is reserved for only the most serious moral offenses, which could rot the young girl’s heart, not for simple social *faux pas* that will correct themselves. In fact, stresses Émilie, external things are simply not as important. The girl must learn to care about her reputation and must have “la crainte du public,” but “ne lui inspirez jamais ni crainte ni envie de plaire ou de déplaire à une telle personne en particulier,” Émilie advises. When it comes to vices, the girl must learn only to fear her own conscience, and to desire, as a reward for her virtues, “que la douceur inexprimable d’être sans reproche à ses propres yeux” (1:36). Instead of learning to act always in accord with what other people will expect her to do or social conventions, Pauline must learn to be the best judge of her own conduct. In sum, says Émilie, “le but de mon éducation est d’élever l’âme de mon enfant” (1:36). It is important that Durand never try to trick Pauline.

Émilie concedes that she is really asking quite a lot of Durand as an educator, especially as she must “causer continuellement” and make use of everything as a pretext for teaching moral lessons (“tirer parti de tout pour lui former le cœur” (1:36)) – an echo of an idea we saw above, namely that Durand must use everything at her disposal, such as their natural surroundings during a walk, to teach several types of lessons: moral (alleviate the suffering of an animal, develop empathy), aesthetic (appreciate the beauties of nature), physical (get exercise), scientific (observe how insects do various kinds of work). Some books are involved in Émilie’s method. There might perhaps be a globe or maps for the geography lessons. But otherwise, the stuff of

everyday life – walks, sewing, conversation, writing paper – are the only tools the governess and child need to engage in these lessons. “Former le cœur” is the most important aspect of Pauline’s education, and her “esprit” comes next: “L’esprit ira tout seul, ou, si les progrès en sont lents, ils seront du moins sûrs et solides” (1:36). Sure and solid progress is preferable to the rapid learning of vapid lessons. D’Épinay emphasizes that she is breaking with tradition when she evokes “Les sots entêtés de leurs vieux préjugés [qui] diront peut-être que nous n’y entendons rien” (1:36). The “vieux préjugés” might refer to not teaching girls anything, or to providing them more orthodox religious education. Let the dumbbells object to her methods, Émilie says. She knows that the outcome of her daughter’s education will be well worth it: “un jour à venir, elle et son mari nous remercieront” (1:36).

Émilie’s educational program for her daughter eliminates the shortcomings of the rules proposed by Le Père \*\*\* and Balbi, chiefly in the importance it places upon critical thinking – Pauline must be allowed to question everything, if she wishes – and the emphasis placed on not teaching Pauline simply to please others. Pauline is not scolded for every little social faux pas; the development of her virtues is much more important. Following Émilie’s rule, Pauline spends her entire day learning through reading, writing, conversation, introspection, and experience, especially contact with nature. In Pauline’s evening *examen*, we hear an echo of the practices Le Père \*\*\* recommended, put to more fruitful use. The practice also resembles, in many respects, the idea behind M. de Lisieux’s journal. Through this daily *examen*, Pauline will come to know herself better and can work on her moral improvement. It will help her to be sincere.

The rule that Émilie develops for Pauline is a vast improvement on the rules provided by Le Père \*\*\* and Balbi. Émilie is able to formulate this rule only as her own education in sincerity continues in adulthood.

### The Idea of a Spiritual Director

At the age of 30, her mother describes Émilie as a “newborn babe” and she hands her over to Volx for him to advise. Her remark indicates how much Émilie still has to learn. Now, M. de Lisieux has served Émilie as a kind of secular spiritual director throughout her formative years, and while he continues to serve in this capacity to some extent, M. Volx assumes the role once he and Émilie begin a relationship. Thus, while Lisieux is present throughout *Montbrillant*, he seems to withdraw in the novel’s last third. While Volx does serve as a teacher-figure to Émilie, during the time they are together, Émilie also reaches a state of maturity in her sincerity and moral courage, and their relationship eventually assumes more of a counselor-to-peer aspect rather than the teacher-student dynamic that Émilie had with Lisieux.

Volx is especially well suited to teach sincerity, partly because he may incarnate some German stereotypes of the eighteenth century. When *Montbrillant* is read as a *roman à clefs*, we find that the characters inspired by Grimm and d’Holbach, the Germans d’Épinay knew, in other words, are transformed into Volx and Wils. And these fictional counterparts are... Scottish. But there is still something Germanic about Volx. Mary Trouille discusses the name *Volx* in *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*. The resonances she finds in it are the Latin *vox*, or “voice” and “opinion,” as well as the German *volk*, or “people.” Trouille concludes that the name reveals the “ambivalence” d’Épinay felt toward her male mentors: on the one hand, a wish that Volx’s praise of her writing would be the opinion of the public, and on the other hand, an acknowledgement that like Volx, who encouraged her but censored her at the same time, the people would not encourage her, as a woman author, to publish her work and would want her to keep it to herself (142-143). I think that Trouille’s arguments are compelling, but in reading *Montbrillant* as an

educational novel promoting sincerity as an existential stance, it is possible to see another layer of meaning in the name, arising from the German *volk*.

We may see in the name a generic composite of German stereotypes as seen from a French point of view. Seen in that light and given his role as an educator to the adult Émilie on how to be sincere, the name Volx conjures up the notion of *preußische Tugenden*, or Prussian virtues. These virtues included, among others, *Redlichkeit*, or frankness/probity, and *Aufrichtigkeit*, or sincerity, and are often summed up by quoting the poem „Der alte Landmann an seinen Sohn” (“The Old Farmer to His Son”) by Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty (1748–1776), whose opening includes the lines „Üb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit / Bis an dein kühles Grab; / Und weiche keinen Fingerbreit / Von Gottes Wegen ab.” Volx was inspired by Grimm,<sup>5</sup> who was Bavarian, not Prussian. However, he worked for Germans from other states and the *Correspondance littéraire* went out to readers in different states, including Prussia. In that sense we may think of Grimm as being in touch with many German sensibilities, not just his native Bavarian ones. We may also think that with a name evoking the *volk*, no particular German sub-nationality was at issue when d'Épinay created the character. These values may have been familiar to people throughout the German-speaking world. Mozart, for example, who was not Prussian but Austrian, in later years adapted music from *The Magic Flute* to fit the Hölty poem, and the song was played by the carillon of the Potsdam Garrison Church where Frederick the Great was buried. Mozart was also personally known to d'Épinay and Grimm, and we can surmise that they might have all shared similar values.

In the German-speaking states, eighteenth-century views of the French were not very favorable. French people were seen as dishonest, cheaters both in war and in love. Syphilis, after

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Trouille 115-16; 143; 342n25.

all, was called “the French disease.” The French seemed childish and had corrupt morals. They were obsessed with wearing the latest fashions. In the *Völkertafeln* or People’s Tables, charts comparing the various traits of different European peoples produced in the early eighteenth century, “the Frenchman” is characterized as “betrügerisch,” fraudulent, and his favorite pastime is “fraud.” He is friendly and his manners are “careless” or “frivolous” (*leichtsinnig*).<sup>6</sup> There do not seem to have been quite as many German as French stereotypes in the eighteenth century, perhaps because there were so many different German states.<sup>7</sup> However, there were some pan-Germanic stereotypes – some of which came from Tacitus – including that Germans liked to drink and were war-like and cruel. Germans were also considered witty.<sup>8</sup> The *Völkertafeln* depict “the German’s” manners as being “*offenherzig*,” that is, open, frank, candid, and sincere (*aufrichtig*).

Volx is certainly all of these things. Émilie has heard about him and met him briefly before, but he definitively bursts onto the scene when, at a party, people are gossiping about Émilie and smearing her reputation. Volx points out that they do not have any evidence of the things about which they are speculating and that he, for one, would reserve judgment. His candor gets him in trouble; another man challenges him to a duel, in which Volx is wounded. Volx shows how sincerity can be heroic. He literally puts his life on the line for what he believes in. The duel episode allows d’Épinay to make the equation between a kind of aristocratic heroism and sincerity.

Through Lisieux’s, and later, Volx’s counsel, Émilie finally reaches a point where she is back in touch with her moral compass and can speak forthrightly to others about her thoughts

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<sup>6</sup> Stanzel, ed. *Europäischer Völkerspiegel*, 134, 169-173, 177, 179.

<sup>7</sup> Stanzel, 196.

<sup>8</sup> Stanzel, 135, 195, 197, 199, 205.

and feelings. As I see it, developing an inner moral life and cultivating the strength necessary to make one's outer life match it is part of a new conception of the individual emerging at the time d'Épinay was writing. She claims the right for women to be this sort of individual, too, an idea that will be germane to how she proposed to overhaul marriage.



## Chapter Eight: D'Épinay's Reforms for the Family and the State

Among other things, L'*Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant* is the story of an individual's progress. Readers first follow Émilie as she endures her own education, which, with the exception of M. de Lisieux's participation, largely has the effect of diminishing her self-esteem and drives a wedge between her authentic inner self and her actions. We learn at the novel's outset that penniless but noble Émilie is on a quest to marry a gentleman who will take on her name and her arms, an objective she fails to achieve, but a quest that is passed on to her daughter Pauline in the novel's second half. As Pauline takes up this trajectory, Émilie embarks on another quest to become an educator. At the novel's end, no longer needed, Émilie dies, and Pauline marries the gentleman, fulfilling the quest and completing the narrative arc. *Montbrillant* is also the story of two children, Émilie's son and daughter, educated in different ways, and how the education they receive determines what their characters are like at the threshold of adulthood.

But if *Montbrillant* is the story of different individuals' quests and the story of at least three educations, it is also the story of a family. Émilie's mother and aunts, her uncles, her husband, her brother-and-sisters in law, and her children all play important roles. Notably, M. de Montbrillant is important in convincing readers that Pauline's marriage quest is necessary. Besides the ever-looming threat of poverty and the convent, M. de Montbrillant's abuse convinces women readers that they must find and marry a certain type of man, and that he must resemble Volx, who acts like a true gentleman, and not M. de Montbrillant, the dishonorable and ersatz gentleman, the entitled bourgeois who buys a house full of gilded furniture he cannot afford. *Montbrillant* shows the deleterious effects on a family of M. de Montbrillant's abuse in its many dimensions.

M. de Montbrillant is not only abusive to his family, and especially to his wife, but he is also abusive to the French people in his capacity as a representative of the French state. In the rest of this chapter, we will see how his abuses of power in his official capacity mirror those within his family. These parallels established, in the last part of the chapter, I will discuss how d'Épinay's proposals to use sincerity in place of a dowry and to change the quality of relationships within marriage had revolutionary potential. In d'Épinay's vision, there are no heads on pikes, no violent mobs, just quiet, slow, progressive, incremental change starting within the existing social structure, one individual and then one family at a time.

#### Victimized Woman as Emblem of the French People Living in a Corrupt State: Parallels with Montesquieu and Prévost

*Montbrillant* participates in a French literary tradition in which the figure of the victimized woman represents the French people under the monarchy. The most famous eighteenth-century example is probably Montesquieu's *Les Lettres persanes* (1721), which explicitly links gender-based and political tyranny in its portrayal of Usbek's harem.<sup>1</sup> The harem represents a despotic regime, which is juxtaposed with the French State to ironic effect. Not content to simply draw parallels between the harem and the State, Montesquieu explicitly connected the two in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), saying, "la servitude des femmes est très

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Thomas draws another parallel relating to the oppression of women in highlighting the similarities between the harem and the convent in *La Religieuse* (37). Thomas concludes that while both Montesquieu and Diderot demonstrate "a certain anti-feminism" in their works, by "show[ing] how the perversion of male values corrupts and destroys society itself" in their portrayals of the harem and the convent, both authors "unwittingly become champions of women's rights" (45). See Thomas, "Montesquieu's Harem and Diderot's Convent: The Woman as Prisoner."

conforme au génie du gouvernement despotique, qui aime à abuser de tout.”<sup>2</sup> Another work suggesting a link between men’s victimization of women and the State’s abuse of its people is Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut* (1728-1731), in which the eponymous Manon elects to prostitute herself.<sup>3</sup> In some readings, Manon seems like less a victim of a patriarchal society than an independent woman refusing to, in Susan Gasster’s words, “join the primary social structure.”<sup>4</sup> However, men in power constantly threaten Manon with incarceration, either in a convent or prison, and des Grieux’s father arranges to have her sent to inhospitable Louisiana against her will, where she dies, and thus Manon can be read as a victim of patriarchal power and the State.

If we consider *Manon Lescaut* and *Les Lettres persanes* as representative examples, we see that there is a marked difference between them. Montesquieu’s story relies on analogy and juxtaposition to condemn a despotic leader, while Prévost’s more directly implicates the culprits. He does not point the finger at the king, but rather at a more diffuse system of patriarchal power embodied in the rich men, like the *fermier général* or tax farmer-general, M. de B. and the elder and younger M. de G\*\*\*M\*\*\*, who seek Manon’s services, and, with des Grieux’s father, pry her and des Grieux apart, literally putting them in chains. D’Épinay’s *Montbrillant* combines the strategies of both novels: it captures the functioning of a despotic system from top to bottom, and its critique of the State is both analogical and direct. On the one hand, the Montbrillant family is a microcosm and analogy of the State. On the other, d’Épinay directly critiques the inner workings of the French economic, government, and legal systems, showing how they work to erode the common good. The family and State, then, rely on each other to maintain the power structure. D’Épinay’s critique extends from the king to a much wider network of functionaries

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<sup>2</sup> Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, in *Œuvres complètes*, II, Livre XVI, ch. 9, p. 514.

<sup>3</sup> Prévost, *Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*.

<sup>4</sup> Gasster, Susan. “The Practical Side of Manon Lescaut.”

and agents, especially the *fermiers généraux*. Much of her critique focuses on the figure of M. de Montbrillant.

Another link between these three works is the theme of financial victimization specifically. Julia Douthwaite has analyzed the role John Law's System plays in both *Les Lettres persanes* and *Manon Lescaut*.<sup>5</sup> While *Les Lettres persanes* presents "a cautionary tale about listening to swindlers,"<sup>6</sup> *Manon Lescaut* explicitly links Manon's victimization to Law's System, because it was designed to rely on revenue generated in French territory in the New World, and in order to generate it, France resorted to forcing its "undesirables"<sup>7</sup> – the "incarcerated, hospitalized, and impoverished of Paris" – onto boats headed for America.<sup>8</sup> Manon was one of these undesirables and met the same fate as 80% of French people sent to the New World: death within one year.<sup>9</sup> While *Montbrillant* does not discuss Law's System or its fallout, d'Épinay's work takes on another notorious system: the tax farm, or *ferme générale*. And just as *Les Lettres persanes* offered readers a warning about the dangers of believing hucksters, *Montbrillant* is a fable, whose lessons, although primarily focused on the proper form of education and intended for mothers, also extend to preaching to a wider public about the dangers of unchecked spending and corrupt taxation. These latter lessons, as we will see, are intimately tied to d'Épinay's educational project, for she believes that the sincerity she would teach would ultimately lead to reform within French financial institutions, notably the tax farm, while at the same time reforming families' household economies. Rather than simply providing a cautionary tale, she also proposes reforms for the corrupt institutions of eighteenth-century France. D'Épinay

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<sup>5</sup> Douthwaite, "How Bad Economic Memories are Made."

<sup>6</sup> Douthwaite, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Douthwaite, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Douthwaite, 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> Douthwaite, 51-52.

explicitly connects the victimization of women in its many dimensions, but especially its financial aspect, to the victimization of the French people as a whole by the State by showing the parallels between the home and the State economy as well as the flow of capital that inseparably links the two economies.

*La Ferme générale, M. de Montbrillant et le roi: L'état c'est eux.*

One of the most enduring symbols of financial misconduct in the eighteenth century is the *Ferme générale*, or tax farm. *Fermiers généraux*, or tax collectors, were appointed for renewable six-year contracts, and traveled to different regions of France to collect all types of taxes, including the hated *gabelle*, or salt tax, on behalf of the king. *Fermiers généraux* had to raise a certain amount of revenue, which was paid to the king in regular *rentes*. Because they could not always rely on the amount of taxes that would be paid on time, *fermiers généraux* had to assess the risk of not collecting this amount in a given region or district, say, if a crop looked like it might fail, and collect from those able to pay in excess of the amount needed. They could then pocket this excess. Many *fermiers* became fabulously wealthy as a result. One of the most emblematic examples is Nicolas Fouquet, the Superintendent of Finances from 1653-1661, whose château Vaux-le-Vicomte can be seen as a symbol of this kind of abuse. Although they played an important role in keeping the French economy solvent, and also as patrons of the arts,<sup>10</sup> they were soundly criticized for their greed and irresponsibility: Diderot called them a

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<sup>10</sup> For examples of contemporary scholarship that highlight the *fermier généraux*'s contributions to society, the arts, and the economy, see Azimi, *Un modèle administratif de l'Ancien Régime: les commis de la Ferme générale et de la Régie générale des aides*; Durand, *Finance et mécénat: les fermiers généraux au XVIIIe siècle*.

“foutue, vile et basse race”<sup>11</sup> and Lesage presented a most unflattering caricature of the dishonest *fermier général* in *Turcaret*.

Besides a *roman pédagogique* that grapples with some of the principal questions of moral and intellectual formation of the eighteenth century, *Montbrillant* may also be considered part of the same tradition of educational novels and conduct books written for nobles to inspire in them more noble values and to call upon them to act more honorably as works by Richardson, Brooke, and Mackenzie. For d'Épinay, the most important of these noble values is sincerity, which is the primary source of honor. She explicitly links sincerity to money in the novel.<sup>12</sup> For example, when Montbrillant, through irresponsibility, has gotten the family into a dire financial state, Émilie repeatedly urges him to reform himself. In one such passage, she uses the word “sincère” four times to describe the necessary reform.

First, she says, he must get a few weeks' extension from his creditors, “que vous emploierez à faire dresser un état exact et sincère de votre revenu, de vos charges sans exception, de toutes vos dettes, et des ressources que vous croirez avoir.” This first usage of *sincère* may seem surprising. We do not tend to think of financial ledgers themselves as being sincere, though we might think of the accountants who prepared them in terms of being honest or crooked. We might say that someone's books are “cooked,” but even then, the blame falls on the person who cooked them, not the books themselves. But here, d'Épinay's phrase seems to imbue finance itself with this noble value – there are ways of doing finance that are noble (and those are the sincere ways), and there are ways that are not noble.<sup>13</sup> The construction also evokes the power

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<sup>11</sup> Chaussinand-Nogaret, *Gens de finance au XVIIIe siècle*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> For an exploration of the link between currency and value, see Morrissey, *Napoléon et l'héritage de la gloire*.

<sup>13</sup> The idea of noble values is connected to the idea of worth and worthiness, which is key in d'Épinay's conception of marriage, and which also has economic resonances.

that money had over the lives of people like Émilie who were not in control of it. Money seems to take on a life of its own, to have agency. This structure also gives sincerity power; it is such a potent force that it can spill over from the intentions of people and be transferred to things.

Second, after preparing the sincere statement of his debts and assets, Montbrillant must share it with his wife, so that she can go over it with some friends who are knowledgeable about finance, and he must have sincere trust in his wife (“une entière et sincère confiance en moi”), or else she will have to think only of herself, her mother, and her children. In her first two uses of “sincère,” the construction is almost the same – *sincère* is the second of two adjectives used to describe the noun (“un état exact et sincère,” “une entière et sincère confiance”). The repeated use of this structure creates a sort of equivalence between the two nouns, in other words, between the state of Montbrillant’s finances and the openness with which he must share financial information with his wife and the complete trust he must place in her.

Émilie’s third and fourth uses of *sincère* refer to a sincere reform of spending. As long as his plan of reform is sincere, Émilie will think of Montbrillant’s best interests besides her own: “J’entrerais dans tout ce qui pourra servir à vous sauver, pourvu que le plan de votre réforme soit sincère et qu’il me soit démontré qu’il ne ressemblera pas à tant d’autres qui l’ont précédé,” Émilie promises, but she will not get her hopes up:

Si vous aviez eu le courage de me parler de la fin de ces désordres dans vos deux lettres, elles m’auraient fait plus de plaisir que votre situation ne m’eût causé d’inquiétude, parce que *je pourrais me flatter que votre retour à la raison est sincère* et, avec cela, je croirais avoir tout gagné. *Il s’agit de m’en persuader, mon cher ami, par votre conduite*; de répondre à *ma franchise* et à mes procédés comme je le mérite, et de me *prouver*, une bonne fois pour toutes, que vos intérêts, les miens, et ceux de vos enfans ne sont pas des objets indifférens (3:401-402 ; emphases mine)

Because Montbrillant has not been sincere in the past, he must now prove his sincerity through his actions. The word of sincere people in possession of inner nobility can vouch for itself, but

someone like Montbrillant must back it up. We see the same links here between *confiance*, *franchise*, and sincerity as we have seen throughout the novel. In addition to almost personifying the ledger, the repetition of “sincère” in this passage underscores the importance of this concept for d’Épinay in financial contexts specifically, and indicates why teaching children to be more sincere could lead to financial reforms according to d’Épinay’s vision.

When we read *Montbrillant* as an educational novel with the inculcation of sincerity as its goal, d’Épinay’s critique of the *ferme générale* and her proposals for reform come clearly into view. *Montbrillant* confronts the reader with a particularly unscrupulous *fermier général* in the figure of the heroine’s husband. M. de Montbrillant is a vehicle for d’Épinay to present her critique of the *ferme*. He belongs to a corrupt network of *fermiers* who conceal each other’s abuses of the institution. D’Épinay’s portrayal links the public and private spheres by showing how the *fermiers*’ collusion is also inextricably bound up with domestic abuse. She suggests that the State has fiduciary obligations to its people that it does not meet, and her critique of the social injustices built into the economic and legal systems of *Ancien Régime* France, and specifically the abuses and excesses of the *ferme*, extends all the way to the king.

The *ferme* makes its first appearances in *Montbrillant* when the 10-year-old Émilie is forced to rely on the charity of her wealthy *fermier général* uncle and his family. Her uncle and aunt’s marriage is an example of class *mésalliance*. They technically belong to the upper élite of the bourgeoisie, while Émilie herself is a poor noble. D’Épinay suggests that Émilie naturally holds older aristocratic values concerning money and honor, and that these values have been reinforced by her great-aunt de Beaufort, who takes her nobility just a bit too far. In any case, lineage and noble qualities like *fermeté* are more important to Émilie, whereas to her *ferme générale* relations, money is all that matters. With this clash of values firmly established in her



recounting of Émilie's youth, d'Épinay moves on to frame Émilie's marriage as a contest between the two value systems. Émilie cannot meet the dowry requested by a noble suitor and instead marries her cousin, who upon his marriage is granted the office of *fermier général*, arranged by his father. Her new husband quickly goes on to show that his values with regard to money are much more vulgar than his parents' and contrast sharply with the noble values of his wife. For Émilie, it is unthinkable to take on a debt that you have no intention of ever paying off, just like it is unthinkable to make a promise you cannot back up with your actions. Rebecca L. Spang has shown how common it was for people to live on credit in the eighteenth century and that indeed the whole economy of France was built on credit and debt.<sup>14</sup> D'Épinay is not suggesting that everyone should eschew credit and debt, but that they should be used responsibly. "J'ai appris à n'emprunter que quand je suis sûre de pouvoir rendre," Émilie writes (3:413-414). Not so for her husband, and this leads to constant conflict in their marriage.

The personal vicissitudes of the characters may appear to have little to do with the *ferme*, but the vocabulary employed to describe abusive husbands, including *tyran*, *tyrannie*, *despotisme*, and *chaînes* suggests a link between the domestic and political spheres. Émilie's marriage in particular provides a concrete way for d'Épinay to connect the tyranny of men to the tyranny of the State, because the *ferme* interferes in marriage and vice versa and because M. de Montbrillant commits the same kinds of abuses at home and in his work as a *fermier général*.

The *ferme générale* reaches deep into the marriage of M. and Mme de Montbrillant, as two examples will show. In the first, M. de Montbrillant relies on the help of employees of the *ferme* to convince well-respected men to write his father that he is being driven mad by love for his cousin Émilie, whom his family does not want him to marry. When the reports of his

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<sup>14</sup> Spang, *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution*, 44-50.

deranged behavior, all of which were fake, reach his family, they relent and agree to the marriage. Unlike Émilie, who is smitten and devoted, M. de Montbrillant does not love her and has no pretensions to fidelity, but rather simulates in order to manipulate his family and make the point that they cannot control him. He also wants the increased independence the role of *fermier général* would allow him.

In the second example, M. de Montbrillant brings an intoxicated friend, the chevalier de Canaples, into Émilie's bedroom at night and offers her up to him against her will. If she cries out for help, she will be blamed for somehow having created this situation, and if she does not cry out for help, she will be raped. Though they only go as far as violating her privacy and do not physically rape her,<sup>15</sup> their violation of her space is a potent reminder of the threat of sexual violence that Émilie always faces married to such a man and a concrete representation of his power over her. Many years later, one of her husband's associates experiences a religious conversion and confesses to Émilie that both her marriage and the incident featuring the would-be-rapist intruding in her bedroom were conspiracies arranged by her husband with help from members of the *ferme*: "J'ai trempé dans l'horrible complot de votre mariage," he says, "J'ai contribué, depuis, à éloigner de vous M. de Montbrillant pour servir le chevalier de Canaples qui était amoureux de vous. Je le croyais ainsi du moins, mais j'ai su depuis qu'il était d'accord avec votre mari pour vous séduire." He then implicates a wider network of *fermiers* and other associates, saying: "Je ne suis pas le plus coupable, mais il faut que j'expie pour tous" (2:435).

Not only does the *ferme* participate in M. de Montbrillant's intimate family life, but his domestic affairs also bear on his future in the *ferme*. When Émilie seeks to know if she can obtain a legal separation from her husband (the next best thing to divorce, which was not legal at

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<sup>15</sup> Trouille refers to this event as "an attempted rape" (*Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 114), and I agree.

the time), other characters worry that this will so damage Montbrillant's reputation in the eyes of a minister who can influence the king that Montbrillant might be dismissed from the *ferme* when his next term is up. The force of public opinion is also against him. Émilie's *tuteur* reports: "[...] j'avais caché à Madame de Montbrillant les mauvais bruits que j'avais entendu tenir à Paris et à la Cour sur M. de Montbrillant. On parlait hautement de lui faire perdre sa place au renouvellement du bail; sa conduite révoltait le public" (3:220). The public is outraged by Montbrillant's private life, because their money funds his lavish lifestyle, and he briefly tries to repair the damage by pretending to break with his mistress.<sup>16</sup>

The lack of separation between the private and public sphere when it comes to the *ferme* is also demonstrated by the similarity of Montbrillant's conduct as a husband and as a *fermier général*. As a husband, Montbrillant mistreats his wife sexually and emotionally. In addition to the examples we have already considered, to the ledger of emotional mistreatment we can add belittling his wife and gaslighting her when she confronts him about their financial problems; spreading rumors about her in society, including telling everyone that she is a whore, which makes her wonder why she is simultaneously shunned and propositioned; driving a wedge between Émilie and her mother, who, although intensely critical, could have become a source of support for her daughter; breaking Émilie's heart by cheating on her and then laughing at her for being heartbroken when she finds out; denying her the kinds of contact with her children that she would find authentic and fulfilling, including breastfeeding and educating them; and belittling and mocking his wife for having an interest in maternal involvement. Montbrillant shows little sympathy for or understanding of his wife's dreams, motivations, and desires. He is utterly

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<sup>16</sup> Émilie explains to Montbrillant that in order to redeem his reputation with the public and to give them what he owes them, he must not only stop seeing his mistress, but actively compensate for the wrongs he has done to the public at large – and to his children, who are, thanks to his actions, “ruinés” (3:410-411).

disinterested in knowing his children as people. His attitude can be somewhat explained by the conventions of the time among members of the upper class, but only to a point.<sup>17</sup> His educational choices for his children run completely counter to their best interest, and were it not for their mother's intervention, would leave them with weak, immoral characters, with no work ethic or respect for order and discipline, no real knowledge, and no foundation in how to think.

Montbrillant manipulates his entire family in order to get his way. No one else's will is ever done, and the family members have to tiptoe around him and develop creative workarounds to deal with his despotic idiosyncrasies.

In the ledger of sexual mistreatment, we can add that Montbrillant infects his wife with syphilis and waits until she is near death to admit that he himself has it, has hid from her the fact that she is infected, and refused to do anything about it like calling a doctor, thereby endangering her life. Then he does not take *Émilie's* illness seriously, minimizes its impact, laughs about it, and uses it as the foundation for the rumors he spreads about her.

Though Montbrillant's emotional and sexual abuse seriously impacts his family's quality of life, his mistreatment is most often financial: he denies his wife, children, and servants the resources they need for daily life. *Émilie* has to ask, shamefacedly, for a loan from an acquaintance. Montbrillant expects her to deal with his creditors face-to-face, but leaves her no money to pay off the debts. A servant tearfully tells *Émilie* that they have no money left to buy the most basic household provisions, and that some servants have not been paid their wages in over four years. In a scene that borders on the comic, when Montbrillant finally returns after a long absence, his family immediately confronts him about the money they desperately need. He claims to have it and promises to write out a note, but then tries to renege when the pen and

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<sup>17</sup> Another point is that *d'Épinay* is critiquing these very values and conventions, finding them heartless.

paper are brought to him and arranges to have his carriage pull up to the back door so that he can slip out without paying. Throughout the story, M. de Montbrillant's stance toward both the immediate and long-term distress his conduct causes would be best described as callous indifference. He is not a well-meaning bungler; aware of the suffering he causes, he lives the high life and lets others struggle.

Montbrillant's spending makes his wife physically ill with worry. When Montbrillant pressures her to return early from a stay in Geneva where she is under the care of Dr. Tronchin due to her fragile health, it may, the novel suggests, be responsible for hastening *Émilie's* death. Her stay in Geneva had been costing them, and while Montbrillant thinks nothing of spending exorbitant sums on his own pleasures, he expects his wife to make economies to the point of doing without basic necessities and even dying. Upon her return from Geneva, because of Montbrillant's choices, she must devote countless hours to the financial reform and downsizing of her household and to legal maneuvers to ensure that her mother and her children will be provided for, a long procedure that entails Montbrillant turning all the other men in the family against *Émilie* in his attempts to take away any income she might be able to preserve.

Montbrillant's mismanagement of the family money and reputation means that his children will have problems becoming established in life because of their lack of capital and because of the shame that will be associated with their name. *Émilie* explains that providing for his children's future is one of the basic duties of a father,<sup>18</sup> along with providing a civic and moral example that they can study and emulate, and because Montbrillant has not done these basic duties, he is a bad father. *Émilie's* repeated interpellation of Montbrillant as father underscores this bitter reality: "Savez-vous que, suivant les lois divines et humaines, vous êtes

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<sup>18</sup> See 3:410-411.

leur tuteur, civil et moral? leur père enfin?"; "Je sais ce qu'un avocat peut répondre à cela ; mais vous, père, cela vous suffira-t-il pour avoir la conscience en repos lorsque vos enfans se verront dépourvus d'emplois et d'établissement par votre faute?" (3:411-412). Here again we see that a father *qua tuteur* is supposed to have a dual role, both moral and financial. In this regard, M. de Lisieux is, not simply an adequate *tuteur*, but an exemplary one, as he is an unerring moral compass and he even provides a small dowry for Pauline. M. de Montbrillant, on the other hand, is not. In fact, after he is stripped of his title of *fermier général*, his son is sent away to complete a commercial formation in Brussels, where Émilie's *tuteur*, M. de Lisieux, can watch over him.<sup>19</sup> This decision is motivated as much by the son's eventual financial need as by a need to repair the damage done by the son's poor education at the hands of Balbi and his father, to rectify moral defects in the son's character, including insincerity and being unaccustomed to work, and finally, by a need to recuperate the family's reputation: "J'observe que, dans l'état malheureux où nous sommes," Émilie writes, "il faudrait que mon fils fût un sujet de distinction pour réparer les malheurs de son père, et que nous sommes exposés à la dernière confusion s'il n'est pas au moins un sujet médiocre" (3:480). Meanwhile, Montbrillant's daughter Pauline will likely have no dowry. This will make it nearly impossible for her to marry, and she lacks other options besides entering a convent, which d'Épinay argues, should be reserved for those with a vocation, because it is a type of life sentence. The financial deprivation and moral failings of their father explain why Émilie wants her children to think that they will have recourse to nothing other than their own merits to ensure their livelihood in the future and wants them to pursue their education diligently with this goal in mind.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See 3:479-480; 498.

<sup>20</sup> See 3:460.

Montbrillant has no money available for his family in part because he spends exorbitant sums on his mistresses. After having a house built for his mistress and her sister, he establishes a theater there. As for the shows they regularly put on, “[i]l ne faut qu’une demi-douzaine de soirées comme celle-là pour mener toute une famille à l’hôpital” (2:454), in other words, just a few such shows could land a family in poverty. His purchases can be summed up (in Émilie’s words) as “ce que le luxe le plus recherché, et j’ose dire le plus indécent, peut imaginer d’inutile et cependant d’agréable” (2:324). At one point, although he is deeply in debt, he purchases an expensive set of gilded furniture. And when his château is falling down because he has not invested in its upkeep, he decides it is the perfect time to add new wings. Out of a throng of prospects, Montbrillant manages to choose the architect with the least experience and whose proposed plan is the most “assommée d’ornemens mesquins et de mauvais goût” (2:564). The gilded furniture and the gaudy new additions to a house that is rotten at its core are emblematic of Montbrillant’s mindset: ostentation over substance and unlimited debt he never intends to pay off.

As a *fermier général*, Montbrillant behaves in much the same way as he acts as a husband. Émilie is not the only woman Montbrillant threatens with sexual violence, and she is not the only woman to whom he fails to meet his financial obligations. Montbrillant uses his tax-collecting job as a pretext to “seduce” women in his assigned regions of France in return for promises of payment. In one episode that is a fable pitting good and innocence against corruption incarnate, he targets the aptly named M. and Mme Constant. In the Constant episode, we again see Montbrillant collude with a number of his colleagues in the *ferme*. They help him by leaving the office so he can proposition Mme Constant without witnesses and by serving as false witnesses who testify against M. Constant so that he will lose his job and reputation, leaving him

unable to find work anywhere. Montbrillant can then force Mme Constant to sleep with him through promises of payment, on which he does not make good. In desperation, Mme Constant travels to Paris and appeals to Émilie. Although he initially refuses, Émilie eventually convinces her husband to tell his superiors in the *ferme générale* that firing M. Constant was a mistake. Montbrillant balks, telling Émilie he would rather say that he fired M. Constant to make an example of him for committing a minor offense. “Comment?” replies Émilie. “Vous aimez mieux avoir fait une injustice réfléchie?” (2:321) Émilie’s reaction raises the question of unjust power, to which d’Épinay repeatedly returns in the novel.

She is not afraid to criticize royal power and suggests that the king leaves his subjects, especially women, vulnerable to poverty and abuse. In her later educational work, *Les Conversations d’Émilie*, d’Épinay explains that every family has a head: “Chaque maison compose une famille plus ou moins grande; chaque famille a un chef qui la gouverne et la protège; à qui l’on est convenu de s’en rapporter, qui veille aux intérêts de chacun, et à qui chacun est soumis” (146),<sup>21</sup> and she equates this head with the father. When Émilie asks La Mère what the king is, La Mère explains, “C’est le chef d’une grande famille,” thus making an analogy between the king and the head of a family who must provide for and protect his family. Then she details how the kingdom works: that ministers, governors, intendants, and others carry out the king’s will on his behalf, and that the State breaks down into units that the king governs – from the whole kingdom on down to the provinces, cities, and towns, and that the basic unit in this breakdown is the family. In other words, the king governs *families* (“Nous sommes une des familles qu’il gouverne” (148-149)). Again we see that d’Épinay’s references linking king to family are simultaneously analogical and direct. In this respect, d’Épinay’s work fits into a long

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<sup>21</sup> For the full discussion of family structure and how masters should be good fathers to their servants, see *Conversations*, 145-147.



tradition linking the king and father in this way. Indeed, not only was the king deposed from the throne, but the status of the father was put in jeopardy in the Revolution, as Lynn Hunt explains: “[t]he Revolution opened the way to a reconsideration not only of state authority but also of authority within the family. [...] The story of the king’s fall from his lofty position was intimately tied up with the fortunes of the ideal of the good father.”<sup>22</sup>

In another passage, La Mère does not say whether the king is a *good* father to his children or not, and she side-steps this question when Émilie asks:

ÉMILIE – C’est beau d’être Roi?

MÈRE – Et sur-tout de mériter le titre de bon Roi.

ÉMILIE – Et pourquoi cela est-il si beau?

MÈRE – Parce qu’un bon Roi est le pere de son peuple, qu’il est souverainement juste, qu’il fait la gloire de sa nation, et que le bien public, c’est-à-dire, de tous les ordres de citoyens est son ouvrage, comme le bonheur d’une famille est l’ouvrage et l’occupation d’un bon pere.

ÉMILIE – Le Roi est donc bien heureux?

MÈRE – Sans doute. Puisque le bonheur est la récompense de tous ceux qui font du bien dans leur classe, jugez du bonheur de celui qui fait le bien général!

ÉMILIE – Il doit être bien aimable aussi?

MÈRE – Par la même raison. Mieux on remplit ses devoirs, plus on est heureux ; et plus on est content de soi, plus on est aimable pour les autres. Or quand on a rempli tous les devoirs les plus importants, je pense qu’on doit être souverainement aimable. (150)

La Mère again describes the king as a father, twice, placing further emphasis on this analogy.

Here she describes the ideal king, who would deserve his title, relying on general platitudes like “[m]ieux on remplit ses devoirs, plus on est heureux,” without saying exactly whether *their* king merited his title or felt this satisfaction in a job well done.

In *Montbrillant*, however, d’Épinay’s critique is a little more pointed.<sup>23</sup> Émilie’s father had been a loyal subject who had spent his fortune in the exercise of his state functions. When at

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<sup>22</sup> Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 17. For more information, see 17-52.

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this is another reason to explain why the novel was not published during d’Épinay’s lifetime.

his death he leaves Émilie nothing but debts and she appeals to one of the king's ministers for a *pension*, the minister gives her nothing and makes light of her plight. Later on, while the king does eventually dismiss Montbrillant from the *ferme*, it is not until after the latter has committed abuses all over the land. At one point, Émilie and her husband criticize the king for failing to keep a promise he made to them. Émilie says they would have had their way if they had just held out a little longer, but Montbrillant had caved under the pressure. (Coincidentally, we see Émilie's noble values, especially her courage, emerge here in a sort of *mini-Fronde*.) Finally, d'Épinay establishes equivalence between Montbrillant's mistreatment of his family and the king's at the end of the novel, where both men shorten Émilie's life. Already in fragile health, Montbrillant's financial ruin is one nail in Émilie's coffin; M. Volx being accused of spying and exiled is the other. The loss of Volx's presence achieves the total destruction of Émilie's health, and as a result, the heroine spends many grueling days in suffering, delirium, and tears. Émilie and her associates find that the king is weak and inequitable in not supporting Volx in the face of the unjust accusation, even when all the exonerating facts have come to light. It appears that d'Épinay toned down her critique of the king in successive drafts. In one of the many pathetic scenes with her family preceding Émilie's death, recounted by Émilie's friend Garnier, Pauline rails against

l'injustice des hommes et sur ce qu'il est plus difficile à un honnête homme de paraître innocent qu'à un méchant de paraître bon. Elle ne concevait pas comment ces messieurs récusaient le témoignage de sa mère et le mien, qui savions la vérité, tandis qu'ils ajoutaient foi aux propos du Roi et des ministres, qui ne jugeaient que sur les apparences.

D'Épinay allows Pauline to think (and say, in front of several people) that the king is unjust.

Pauline's youth excuses her – she said these things, which were “très naïves,” with “le dépit de son âge” – but Émilie is an adult, and even when she is delirious, perhaps it was saying too much when d'Épinay originally wrote:

Tout à coup elle se leva avec force, et nous jugeâmes par son délire qu'elle se croyait [*devant le roi ou*] devant des juges, plaidant la cause de M. Volx. Ses propos n'avaient aucune suite. Elle appela cependant sa mère et lui dit: "A présent, maman, que j'ai rempli mon devoir [*envers le Roi*], je ne suis plus suspecte. [...]" (3:538-539 ; emphases mine)<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps d'Épinay removed these two references for stylistic reasons, but it is curious that she removes the words "le roi" from Émilie's mouth, when they reinforce the idea of the king's injustice. In any case, this episode presents a heart-wrenching tableau of three generations of women from one family, in tears, hands joined, discussing a voyage to the *au-delà* (Émilie says they can leave in eight days), which is perhaps the only escape from the victimization they suffer at the hands of irresponsible men. But d'Épinay wants women readers to avoid the same fate, and it is through changes to the individual family brought about by changes in education that d'Épinay hopes to achieve broader social change.

D'Épinay was not alone in wanting to change marriage through education, particularly the education of girls.<sup>25</sup> But, as we have seen, some features set her plan apart, including, among others, the idea that a mother could be her child's ideal teacher. In terms of moral development, Émilie aims to develop her children's sincerity above all. Though social rules often dictate that women must dissimulate, she would like for her daughter to come to the point she herself has finally reached when, after many years of suffering the consequences of insincerity, Émilie declares, "j'ai commencé à oser être moi; [...] Je ne fais plus que ce qui me plaît; [...]" and tells a friend, "vous pouvez me croire quand je vous dis que vous me ferez plaisir de venir me voir ici. Je le pense apparemment, puisque je vous le dis. Quelle raison m'y obligerait sans cela? Je n'en

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<sup>24</sup> On the successive revisions, see 3:539nn2-3.

<sup>25</sup> See Bérenguer, *Conduct Books*, 89-90 for a discussion of how virtue was an important means of attracting a husband in d'Épinay's *Les Conversations d'Émilie*. It was a topos found in educational treatises of the period written by other authors (Bérenguer, 90), who, like d'Épinay, seized upon the idea of changing society through changing the nature of the marriage system through changing the education of girls (Bérenguer, 99, 104-105).

connais pas qui me puisse faire dire le contraire de ma pensée, et encore moins de mes sentimens” (3:209). D’Épinay provides the reader with lessons on how to carefully observe the character of all the people in their lives, and especially potential lovers, to determine the extent of their sincerity. She suggests that girls raised in such a fashion would, through their virtue, be able to interest potential mates with similarly noble values, even if the girls lacked a dowry, and would be able to make judicious decisions regarding their marriage partners. Marriages based on sincere vows would be monogamous; love and fidelity would overtake money in importance. Sincerity would change the financial and affective bases of marriage, transforming its hierarchical structure into a partnership of equals.

Through Émilie’s story, d’Épinay provides an education in financial and legal matters for her women readers, so that women could participate more equally in their families’ financial dealings. Sincerity also dictates what boys learn about money in d’Épinay’s proposed curriculum. Émilie wants her son to learn from his father’s bad choices and conduct, specifically as regards his business dealings, so that the son can avoid repeating them. On the subject of money, she wants to teach him that “l’on n’est estimé que par l’usage qu’on en fait” and that money is like “une épée entre les mains d’un sage ou d’un fol...” (2:313). He must learn to think of his reputation as his financial credit, because they are one in the same. He must enter into contracts sincerely, keep his word, and only buy on credit if he intends to pay off the debt.

In *Les Conversations d’Émilie*, there is a related lesson in which we see La Mère teaching Émilie about managing household affairs in the guise of teaching her to pick up her things after she is done working or playing. As Émilie says, “Oui. Remettez chaque chose à sa place; cela donne l’esprit d’ordre” (154). Émilie asks:

ÉMILIE – Mais, Maman, à quoi sert d’avoir l’esprit d’ordre?

MÈRE – A tout. Point d'esprit de conduite sans l'esprit d'ordre. Or que pensez-vous de quelqu'un qui ne sait pas se conduire? Ordre et règle sont synonymes en fait de conduite. L'esprit d'ordre règle tout et assigne à chaque chose sa véritable place. Sans lui on ne sait jamais ce que l'on fait, sans compter que rien n'est si commode que l'esprit d'ordre. Il vous fait sur-tout gagner du temps, et vous savez que le temps est la chose du monde la plus précieuse. (154)

Put in these terms, this lesson could apply to any aspect of household management, including financial aspects. Montbrillant does not even know the condition of his lands, but someone who learned to keep track of their possessions would presumably do better in this regard. As part of this lesson, La Mère also states, “une personne prudente songe au lendemain” (155). When Émilie wants to blame servants for moving her things, La Mère underscores that she must take responsibility for her own things and her own actions to contribute to or detract from household order (156).

On the one hand, d'Épinay's educational proposals are conservative, in that they are centered on moral education. However, they are also forward-looking in that she does incorporate scientific knowledge, on, for example, insects and atoms, and encourages curiosity toward the natural world.

Her program is also conservative, in that she does not advocate overthrowing the existing class structure. If anything, in the face of increasing social mobility in the mid-eighteenth century, she clings to notions of old nobility and justifies their existence through claims of innate superiority. She calls for nobles to get in touch with their inborn values through more noble conduct, and argues that a truly noble person's values are worth much more than money, which was then superseding them in social importance. On the other hand, by suggesting that children can learn to be more sincere, and thus, more noble, and by showing how it is done, she opens the door for noble values to become more democratic. Mothers convinced by d'Épinay's demonstration in *L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant* would raise their children according to

Émilie's program; their daughters in turn would grow up to become educators for their own children, and little by little the upper classes would become more sincere, and with them, institutions like the *ferme*. D'Épinay's vision might thus be described as a nonviolent alternative to revolution, or a slow, quiet revolution that ends up changing the State one family at a time.

#### How Representative Was M. de Montbrillant of *Fermiers généraux*?

Émilie's mother thinks that her daughter's experiences are in many ways representative of women trapped in miserable marriages: Émilie has "subi le sort commun des femmes que leur mari délaisse de bonne heure" (Badinter ed., 2:501). According to Mary Trouille,<sup>26</sup> Émilie's experiences are indeed representative of those of many upper-class women who were the victims of their husbands' financial mismanagement and the patriarchal system that kept the women dependent on such men (*Sexual Politics*, 98).

But how representative is M. de Montbrillant of *fermiers généraux*? Can he really be a symbol for all of them? There were many *fermiers généraux* who took their responsibilities very seriously indeed, assessed carefully how much tax to collect, and kept careful track of the taxes they collected. One example was the famed chemist who discovered, among other things, the law of conservation of mass, Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier, who, in his role as *fermier général*, commissioned the customs wall around Paris and applied scientific principles and mathematical algorithms to tax collection to make sure he collected only the necessary amount of taxes. Unlike M. de Montbrillant, who has or claims to have no idea of the true state of his finances, Lavoisier was exacting and kept meticulous records. The careful approach to measurement that allowed

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<sup>26</sup> Trouille refers to these experiences as d'Épinay's, not Émilie's, but what she sees as d'Épinay's experiences are derived from Émilie's story in *Montbrillant*. See Chapter 3 in *Sexual Politics*.

him to discover the law of conservation of mass was similar to his approach to his ledgers: accuracy was of paramount importance. He took an ethical approach to his work and tried to help those who had been bilked by the *ferme* by advocating for taxation reforms.<sup>27</sup>

An associate of Lavoisier, Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, physiocrat and later progenitor of the famous Du Pont family in the United States, was also keenly interested in doing finance ethically. Editor-in-chief of the *Journal d'agriculture, du commerce et des finances* from September 1765 to November 1766, Du Pont de Nemours also authored such works as the *Rapport fait sur le droit de marque des cuirs* (1788) and the *Rapport fait, au nom du comité des finances, à l'Assemblée nationale, par M. Du Pont, député de Nemours. Le 14 août 1790, sur la répartition de la contribution en remplacement des grandes gabelles, des petites gabelles, des gabelles locales & des droits de marque des cuirs, de marque des fers, de fabrication sur les amidons, de fabrication & de transport dans l'intérieur du royaume sur les huiles & savons [Imprimé par ordre de l'Assemblée nationale]* (1790).<sup>28</sup> As this list of publications shows, Du Pont de Nemours favored reforms like the abolition of the hated salt tax, the *gabelle*, which had been levied unevenly throughout France and was thus seen as particularly unjust, in order to help the peasants and others harmed by the *ferme*.

Another upstanding *fermier général* was Jean-François de Laborde, who became a *fermier* in 1739 and “avait eu une vie discrète; il avait économisé, placé de l'argent, sans que les mémoires et les correspondances mentionnent son nom.”<sup>29</sup> In his *Jean-Benjamin de Laborde, ou le bonheur d'être fermier-général*, Mathieu Couty highlights the contrasts between two men in

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<sup>27</sup> This information on how Lavoisier and Du Pont de Nemours approached their work as *fermiers généraux* comes from conversation with Aya Tanaka.

<sup>28</sup> He also wrote the *Troisième rapport fait, au nom du comité des finances, par M. Dupont, député de Nemours, sur le remplacement de la gabelle & des droits sur les cuirs, les fers, les huiles, les savons & les amidons* (1790).

<sup>29</sup> Couty, 8.

the Laborde family: Jean-François, the father, and Jean-Benjamin, the son, who could not have been more different: “Jean-Benjamin traversa la seconde moitié du siècle avec beaucoup plus d’ostentation” (8). While in his role as *fermier général*, Jean-Benjamin, like M. de Montbrillant, spent untold millions on his lover, an actress, and the theater where a handful of the elaborate shows they put on could put a man in poverty, and loved to gamble. Laborde then experienced a spectacular financial failure before becoming an example of reform. (This last in contrast to M. de Montbrillant, who, d’Épinay tells us in the novel’s last words, never really changed his ways or character (3:560)). Couty speaks of Jean-Benjamin’s lifestyle before his fall from grace as being representative of his era and of lifestyles of other *fermiers généraux*.<sup>30</sup> Couty offers a romanticized and nostalgic portrait of Jean-Benjamin, paints him as the product of his age, sees his shortcomings as evidence he was the victim of “l’envers de ce monde agréable,” and seems to excuse his profligate spending, whereas under the pen of d’Épinay, the same person would have been treated more as an agent actively responsible for his conduct and roundly condemned for his moral failings. Nonetheless, Couty makes the same kind of gesture as d’Épinay and the French Revolution did: all make a *fermier général* (or, in the case of the Revolution, *the fermier général*) a symbol of his time. Couty’s phrases like “un spécimen exemplaire de cette époque” and “comme beaucoup d’autres” underscore that Jean-Benjamin’s way of making money and lifestyle were fairly widespread,<sup>31</sup> and, like d’Épinay, he suggests that the king condoned and was responsible for all of this activity.

In the Revolution, the *fermier général* became a symbol of corruption and financial irresponsibility: “En un siècle d’existence et cinquante ans de règne, la ferme générale s’est identifiée aux finances royales au point de concentrer sur elle une grande partie de l’hostilité

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<sup>30</sup> Couty, 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> See Couty, 8-9.



dirigée contre le régime dont elle a symbolisé l'incurie," writes Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret (42). Looking backward from the Revolution, the evidence seems to suggest that though M. de Montbrillant may not be the most honest, talented, or distinguished *fermier général* in France, his lifestyle was not uncommon. But was this symbolism justified historically by widespread abuses and carelessness on the part of the *fermiers généraux*? Was the average *fermier* more like Laborde *père* or Laborde *fils*? Was he more like Lavoisier or M. de Montbrillant? According to Chaussinand-Nogaret, as eighteenth-century institutions go, the *ferme* was one of the better organized (43). He contends that although individuals might have been better or worse *fermiers*, the high level of centralization in the *ferme* would have counterbalanced their idiosyncrasies, and it would seem, then, that M. de Montbrillant must simply be considered one of those *fermiers* who was no good at his job. After all, *Montbrillant* recounts events many of which appear to have taken place before 1750 and it appears that M. de Montbrillant would have assumed his functions before the centralization.<sup>32</sup> How, then, can we read M. de Montbrillant as a symbol of the corrupt *fermier général*, if in general the *ferme* was not that bad?

At least two responses suggest themselves. First, as Chaussinand-Nogaret points out, the Revolution picked up on real injustices in society, the unevenness in the application of taxation, for example, that were attached or became attached in the popular imagination to the figure of the *fermier général*. We could perhaps then read d'Épinay's choice of *fermier général* as symbol as an indirect critique of the real sources of injustice in society. This explanation, however, falls short because as we have seen, it is clear that d'Épinay specifically critiques the *ferme* in the figure of its members, and not the way the *gabelle* and other taxes were collected unevenly, for example. Therefore, it is not particularly helpful in this case to say, "she attacked the *fermier*

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<sup>32</sup> Roth's edition provides approximate dates for the various events.

*général*, but she really meant to attack taxes.” However, as we have seen, d’Épinay is not thinking of the *ferme* in isolation, but is thinking of systemic problems that plague her society, and shows that the *ferme* is tied, for example, to royal power, the household economy, the family structure, and the victimization of women.

A second response is that, as misguided as the Revolution’s response to the *fermier général* was, according to Chassinand-Nogaret, all the same it was the response. In the eighteenth century, he writes, the *ferme* had its partisans and its detractors (40). The detractors had the same response as the Revolution – we might call them prescient pre-revolutionary thinkers. Because through her husband, d’Épinay had a view into the workings of the *ferme*, it may be tempting for some readers to conclude that her portrait of a corrupt *fermier général* is simply the working-out of her animus toward her husband. Though her personal experience afforded her a privileged glimpse into the *ferme*, I argue that we should read d’Épinay’s portrait of the *ferme* in the same light as the critiques by the other *philosophes*, including Diderot’s remark that the *fermiers* were a “foutue, vile et basse race.” Diderot also said of his friend Randon de Boisset, who had briefly been a *fermier général*, “Lorsqu’il vit l’énorme masse d’argent qui lui revenait, il témoigna le peu de rapport qu’il y avait entre son mince travail et une aussi prodigieuse récompense.”<sup>33</sup> Diderot and d’Épinay worked closely together for years, including on an economic text by Galiani, and may have shared ideas on the *ferme*. Another negative response to the *ferme* came from Mercier: “Je ne passe point devant l’Hôtel des Fermes sans pousser un profond soupir. Je me dis que là s’engouffre l’argent arraché avec violence de

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<sup>33</sup> Cited in Chassinand-Nogaret, 48.

toutes les parties du royaume pour qu'après ce long et pénible travail, il entre altéré dans les coffres du roi. Quel marché ruineux, quel contrat funeste et illusoire a signé le souverain!"<sup>34</sup>

Among pre-revolutionary critics of the *ferme* who make the *fermier* a symbol of what was wrong with the *Ancien régime*, d'Épinay distinguishes herself through the parallels and connections she draws between the home and the State economy, and the victimization of the French people and the victimization of women. We might argue then that even if the *ferme* was a comparatively well-organized institution, as Chaussinand-Nogaret does, there are still grave problems with the institution itself, as d'Épinay brings to light.

Because *Montbrillant* was not published during d'Épinay's lifetime, the work did not have a chance to influence society. But the novel was just one part of a larger educational project on which d'Épinay was working at the same time as she was writing *Montbrillant*, and many of the ideas contained within the novel were spread throughout the courts of Europe.

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in Chaussinand-Nogaret, 40.

Part Three:

Re-reading *Montbrillant* in Context

## Chapter Nine: *Montbrillant*: A New Chronology

One of the consequences of reading *Montbrillant* as a memoir is that such a reading leads critics to read the text alongside d'Épinay's correspondence from the years the novel is thought to cover and alongside historical documents like d'Épinay's *séparation de biens* from M. d'Épinay. Through study of such documents, critics try to establish what d'Épinay and Rousseau's friendship was really like. However, some critics like Weinreb and Trouille have begun the work of reading *Montbrillant* alongside other literary texts by d'Épinay, and when we read *Montbrillant* primarily as a *roman pédagogique*, the intertextual network of other d'Épinay texts we must examine grows even wider.

In this chapter, I present further evidence drawn from other works by d'Épinay, that *Montbrillant* was intended as an educational novel. These texts include her other pedagogical texts, *Les Lettres à mon fils* and *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, essays in the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique* attributed to Grimm, and her correspondence with the Abbé Galiani and with Diderot. I also consider *Montbrillant* in conjunction with Rousseau's *Julie* and *Émile*. Reading *Montbrillant* alongside these other texts forces us to reconsider the timeline that has traditionally been assigned to *Montbrillant* and to rethink the place of the novel within d'Épinay's *œuvre*. It also suggests new ways of understanding the literary rivalry between Rousseau and d'Épinay.

### *Mes Moments heureux*

Several texts in *Mes Moments heureux* indicate that d'Épinay had worked out many of her major pedagogical ideas by 1756. D'Épinay's letters on marriage in *Moments* anticipate many of the views that we find in *Montbrillant*. The earliest piece in the collection, *Lettre à la*

*Présidente de M\*\*\** (1747),<sup>1</sup> recommends wifely submission and paints an idealistic portrait of marriage, its author advising la Présidente de M\*\*\* among other things that she is largely responsible for her own happiness in her marriage, that her husband is not as “difficile à vivre” as she imagines, and that her own conduct, though above reproach, “est souvent malentendue, et autorise par là cette jalousie qui vous gêne.”<sup>2</sup> This 1747 letter will undergo a metamorphosis when it reappears in *Montbrillant* a few years later. Its earnest tone, well-meaning preaching, the blame for her relationship failures that is heaped on its recipient, and the excusing of jealous behavior as a manifestation of love are still there, but in its new context, readers see that it comes from the pen of a still very naïve heroine who has only just married and has not yet suffered her own husband’s abuses. The novel allows for a *longue durée* portrait of what happens to its intended recipient. This woman, now no longer la Présidente de M\*\*\* but la Présidente de Sally, Mme de Montbrillant’s cousin, was forced by her family to marry a man she did not love and, after her marriage, is kept a virtual prisoner in the countryside by her husband, who bars her from ever seeing or even communicating with her family. On the one occasion in many years that she manages to communicate with her family, she has to resort to slipping a scrap of paper into someone else’s letter to reach them. On the scrap, her pen breaks off in such a way that her family knows that her husband interrupted her while she was writing and they feel a visceral chill at the realization. The events in *Montbrillant* serve to discredit the views expressed in the 1747 letter, but already in *Moments d’Épinay* may have wanted to distance herself from her early views.

The 1747 letter to the Présidente de M\*\*\* contrasts sharply with another marital advice letter included in *Moments*, the 1756 *Lettre à M\*\*\**, addressed to a bachelor with almost no

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<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres (Moments)*, 9-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres (Moments)*, 10-11.

fortune, who is thinking about getting married to a woman he has never met and who will bring a very small dowry to their union. Interestingly, d'Épinay arranged the two letters so that readers would find them back-to-back, 1747 followed by 1756, perhaps revealing an evolution in her thinking about marriage. In the latter letter, d'Épinay focuses on the financial problems the couple will face, especially in Paris, where certain expenses are necessary to participate in the social economy, and paints a stark picture of the other kinds of stresses financial strain will create in the relationship. She advises against idealizing someone the man does not know and expecting her personal qualities to help them overcome their adversity. Even if he had a large fortune, d'Épinay tells the man to “penser à deux fois” before marrying her, “tant je crois difficile de rencontrer d’abord une bonne femme, et, parmi les bonnes femmes, d’en trouver une qui soi [*sic*] digne de vous.”<sup>3</sup> She reminds the man of his financial obligations toward his children. How will he help them become established? D'Épinay also reveals herself to be a marital-choice advocate, warning that the man must not marry the woman simply to please his parents, saying: “Il n’est, en vérité, point permis de se laisser décider par des considérations étrangères sur une démarche de laquelle dépend sans retour le bonheur ou le malheur de votre vie.”<sup>4</sup> In last analysis, d'Épinay recommends that the man not marry because “votre malheur paraît inséparable de la conclusion de cette affaire” and staying single is preferable to being unhappily married (“une vie trop souvent hérissée de peines”<sup>5</sup>). Gone is the advice from 1747 about going along with society and the family’s plans and making the best of a life shackled to a person one does not love. Although marital choice was an ideal that was becoming more widespread at the time d'Épinay was writing, in actual practice, it was rare, and d'Épinay was a

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<sup>3</sup> I have preserved the spellings used in the published editions to which I refer in the text.

<sup>4</sup> *Œuvres (Moments)*, 31-33.

<sup>5</sup> *Œuvres (Moments)*, 34.

visionary who not only championed the practice, but who also, in *Montbrillant*, showed why it was necessary and provided a guide to help her readers learn to choose a worthy partner. She additionally showed her readers how to become one of the rare “bonne[s] femme[s],” a worthy woman partner. Again in *Montbrillant*, we find the theme of the happiness (or unhappiness) of a person’s life as determined by their marriage.

Like marriage, education is one of *Moments*’ recurring themes, with the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* being one of the most important works therein that treat it. Like its analogue in *Montbrillant*, the *Lettre* ends by evoking d’Épinay’s daughter’s eventual marriage. This ending makes an even stronger statement if we consider the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* within the larger context of *Moments*: it follows directly after the *Lettre à M\*\*\**, the 1756 letter to the bachelor advising him not to get married. Taken together, d’Épinay presents readers with a sequence starting with the 1747 letter telling la Présidente de M\*\*\* to have a better attitude about her marriage, followed by the 1756 letter to the bachelor in which d’Épinay seems to have revised her views on marriage and presents a much more realistic – and pessimistic – view of the institution. Finally, the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* completes the sequence by providing readers with a way to achieve a healthier, happier type of marriage through the education of girls. The three letters give *Moments*’ readers a portrait of three stages of evolution in d’Épinay’s thought: first, a naïve and conventional view of marriage; second, realization of the harsh realities of marriage and criticism of the societal forces, like parental pressure and the expenses expected of couples in Paris; and third, one solution for the problems of marriage – education.

A modified version of the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille* reappears in *Montbrillant* in the novel’s last third. The first two-thirds of the story can be read as the heroine, Émilie’s



development into an educator. At first she is enchanted with marriage, then rapidly disappointed. As the scales fall from her eyes, she seeks various solutions to transcend, first, her personal unhappiness, and then, to improve the plight of women and the dire financial situation in which her children find themselves. The progression of the three letters we have examined from *Moments* parallels the novel's plot. By the time the letter to the governess is presented, Émilie has already settled upon education as the ideal solution to her own and others' unhappiness and financial problems and has devoted herself to educating her children. This letter represents the most crystal-clear formulation of her ideas, and is, I argue, the true climax of *Montbrillant*'s plot.

Educational concerns are also found elsewhere in *Moments*. For example, in her correspondence with Tronchin, which, d'Épinay says, he will call “l'*Itinéraire du bonheur*” and she will call “le bréviaire de l'amitié” (119), the two try to figure out the ideal way to be happy and to live well. Both are concerned with how a person can improve their soul. Although d'Épinay often comes across as a proponent of perfectibility, in an August, 1756 letter to Tronchin, she acknowledges that people can only change so much: “Je conviens que, quoique l'homme ne soit pas libre, son âme est susceptible de modifications ; mais cette modification a des bornes proportionnées aux qualités essentielles, d'où dérive ensuite la manière d'être” (109-111). Reason in a very sensitive person, then, will not destroy their passions but temper them, and sometimes the inexorable hand of fate will prevent such a person from fleeing their demons. D'Épinay's educational programs reflect her belief that children's morals are formed early and must be shaped before they are too set to change.

In another letter, dated October 1756, d'Épinay offers some advice to her doctor, who had written that one of his sons “était né plus sensible que raisonnable” (119).<sup>6</sup> For d'Épinay,

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<sup>6</sup> The whole letter is found in *Œuvres II (Mes Moments heureux)*, 118-127.

being sensitive is a great boon (“Quelle source de bonheur, de satisfaction et de jouissance que la sensibilité! (120)), but it may cause him some difficulties when he is older (“le cœur s’affecte alors de tout, il craint tout, et deux ou trois revers peu considérables suffisent pour détruire cette illusion et surtout cette confiance sans laquelle il n’y a point de bonheur” (120-121)). In the end, however, it is impossible to change someone with such a temperament. One must distinguish, however, between the passions and sensibility, because while sensibility cannot be eradicated, reason, and therefore education, can moderate the passions, but it must be the kind of education one receives in Geneva, not Paris. “L’éducation tient au caractère d’un peuple, à sa forme de gouvernement...,” explains d’Épinay. “Voyez-vous où j’allais? Je m’arrête tout court pour vous faire observer que malheureusement, à Paris, l’éducation ne saurait être que mauvaise” (121-124). What Tronchin’s son needs is “des exemples,” because they always make an effective impression on “une âme bien née.” D’Épinay deplores of finding good examples in Paris, in “un pays où les mœurs ne sont presque plus comptées.” In Paris, he would find just the opposite:

Je dirai bien à mon fils qu’il est d’un homme vil de mal remplir les devoirs de son état; mais il verra tous les jours que ces hommes vils ne laissent pas que d’être considérés. Je lui dirai qu’on n’a droit à sa propre estime et à la considération publique qu’autant qu’on est utile à ses concitoyens, et que pour y réussir le vrai moyen est de se mettre en état de rendre des services à sa patrie [...].

If the boy asked people to define citizen and country, people would laugh in his face and tell him that France has never had and can never have one or the other, a shame because “Voilà cependant les deux grands objets qui doivent émouvoir les hommes, et sans ces deux mobiles il ne reste que la superstition ou des petites passions vicieuses ou insipides” (121-124). In other words, Tronchin should not worry about his son’s sensibility, but should make sure he is in the right place to learn about how to moderate his passions and to serve others as a citizen of his country by learning from examples – and Geneva would be a good place to do this. D’Épinay

traveled to Geneva in person to receive treatment from Tronchin, and she has *Montbrillant*'s heroine, Émilie, make a similar journey near the end of *Montbrillant*. Émilie takes her empathy-deficient, morally immature son along, in the hopes that he will learn how to be in the world from the Genevois, and through emulation, change his heart and his conduct. Including these reflections in a 1756 letter shows that d'Épinay had already worked out the main ideas and, perhaps, the plot of her massive novel as early as that year. Learning by example is not only a motif of the Geneva episode in the novel; it is a constant refrain throughout.

In the October 1756 letter to Tronchin, d'Épinay goes on to say that she herself is “très-sensible” and stresses that Paris has the power to crush the overly sensitive person: “[...] faites débiter à Paris un jeune homme honnête et sensible, il résistera peut-être au torrent et sauvera sa vertu du naufrage, mais il n'évitera pas le malheur; son cœur, en butte aux chagrins, sera bientôt flétri par la mélancolie. De tous ceux qui valent la peine qu'on les remarque, je n'en ai vu aucun parvenir à trente ans sans être attaqué du mal misanthropique” (124). She thinks that the only cure for their suffering is to live in a world “qui ne soit composé que d'honnêtes gens, et qu'ils soient tous exempts des misères attachées à l'humanité” (125). What d'Épinay says here, pitting Geneva against Paris, lamenting the fate of the sensitive soul being crushed underfoot in Paris (and becoming a misanthrope as a result), seems reminiscent of Rousseau, and would be an interesting intertext to examine further. *Montbrillant*'s heroine, the highly sensitive Émilie is similarly crushed, is plunged into what we would today term depression, and even contemplates suicide before learning how she can live in the world, which involves educating the next generation to be honest people and surrounding herself with the right kind of society – in other words, sincere, honest people.

Another passage on education from *Moments* is found in a 1756 letter to “Monsieur de S<sup>t</sup> L\*\*\*” (the marquis Jean François de Saint-Lambert). In it, d’Épinay discusses how she is educating her daughter and asks for his advice. This letter contains a number of ideas that recur in *Montbrillant*, including the rejection of La Fontaine as reading material for young children because they can only recite them “comme des perroquets” (the *Fables* are better suited to children of 10 or 12 years, she says<sup>7</sup>), the dangers of memorizing words without really understanding them, and the range of subjects a girl should learn (137-140). While she tells S<sup>t</sup>-L\*\*\* that she does not think girls need to have a deep understanding of history, in her plan for her daughter’s education, a history lesson was included every day. Indeed, even in what she proposes to S<sup>t</sup>-L\*\*\*, d’Épinay does not shy away from making girls think: she would have them learn philosophy and read the great works in their original languages. Still, she places an emphasis on girls’ moral education above all. Though she tells S<sup>t</sup>-L\*\*\* that she knows nothing and seems to throw herself on the mercy of his generosity to tell her what she should have her daughter read and study (“Donnez-moi de vos idées, et si vous approuvez les miennes, mandez-moi, je vous prie, par où je dois m’y prendre pour les suivre; car vous sçavez que je ne sais rien. Que faut-il lire, que faut-il apprendre ?” (137-140)), this rhetoric reveals itself as nothing but a posture – like that which, McAlpin argues, women whose letters were leaked had to adopt – because d’Épinay already has clear ideas on the education of girls. In *Montbrillant*, though Émilie openly solicits the educational opinions of the learned men around her, she ultimately rejects their programs, apart from some elements judiciously selected and transformed, and presents the educational program she developed herself, having drawn inspiration from several sources.

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<sup>7</sup> This is coincidentally the same age when Émile begins his moral development, and Rousseau makes similar recommendations concerning La Fontaine’s *Fables*.

In d'Épinay's 1757 *Portrait de Lirette ma chienne*, we find the phrase, "Elle est vraie et franche, qualités devenues si rares, si respectables, et dont si peu d'hommes peuvent se vanter," which we will hear echoed in *Montbrillant*, when d'Épinay paints a portrait of a sincere human being and raises questions about how one can be "vrai" without being "franc" and vice versa. Sincerity is key to *Montbrillant's* educational program, and we can see the germ of one of her ideas here.

In *Moments*, we find references to the idea that d'Épinay and her circle were thinking about natural religion, which was part of *Montbrillant* and D'Épinay and Grimm's catechism based on the love of virtue and truth that was integral to their vision of a moral education and that would, ideally, replace the traditional Catholic catechism. *Moments* proves that they were both reading and thinking about Voltaire's views on natural religion in 1756.<sup>8</sup> D'Épinay tells her friend Gauffecourt, for example, "J'attends avec impatience le *Catéchisme* de Voltaire que vous me promettez" (90).

Some of d'Épinay's deist ideas are reflected in the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, according to which her daughter's governess must choose a chapter or two from her catechism to recite to the girl, "en causant et sans livre, ce qu'il contient" (42). D'Épinay is adamant that religion is something one must think about, not simply a collection of prayers or creeds to recite mechanically, writing, "Faites-la cesser dès aujourd'hui de l'apprendre par cœur. Il faut, mademoiselle, que vous conceviez bien ce que vous voulez qu'elle sache: à force d'en causer et

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<sup>8</sup> A January, 1756 letter from d'Épinay's friend Gauffecourt asks d'Épinay for a favor on behalf of Voltaire's niece, Mme Denis. The latter does not want her uncle to know how far his "petit poème sur la *Religion naturelle*" (83) had circulated. Gauffecourt pretended Grimm had it. In response to this news, Voltaire asks Grimm to burn his "sermon," which is, he says, "une œuvre pie assez ancienne que des gens très-indiscrets ont fort défigurée" and "dont les malintentionnés pourraient abuser" (84). Voltaire promises to soon supply Grimm with "le véritable" and in a second letter following on the first, promises, "Je suis sur le point de vous porter ou de vous envoyer le *Catéchisme de la loi naturelle*."

de la questionner sur ce que vous lui aurez dit, elle le retiendra à la fin bien mieux, et d'une manière bien moins ennuyeuse" (42). Far from the hypocritical displays of a *dévoté*, the young girl's religious practices must be sincere and deeply felt, based on religious precepts accepted in the depths of her soul. The hour devoted to catechism should be split equally between historical and dogmatic catechism (42). Allowing her to question the catechism and showing her how it has evolved historically might leave her with somewhat heterodox (or at worst, heretical) beliefs, but to a freethinker like d'Épinay, who embodied the term years before the 1765 *Liberté de penser* article appeared in the *Encyclopédie*, such a path was better than having a shallow, unexamined faith.

When d'Épinay and Grimm use the *Correspondance littéraire* to promote their own deist catechism, some currents of thought from *Montbrillant* make their way into it. One of the key recurring images d'Épinay uses in *Montbrillant* is that of an inner moral compass, which is also important in the deist catechism. We see it prefigured in *Moments*, albeit in a very different form. In the section entitled *Pièces fugitives*, many of the works are poems. When we turn the page after the last page of letters and enter *Pièces fugitives*, it is almost a shock, as d'Épinay changes tone and register. We leave behind the heady, secretive literary doings of the *Correspondance littéraire* group, whose members are described by humorous names such as le Tyran, le Bohémien, le Syndic, le Perroquet, la Tête-de-Paille, la Parfaite, les Ours (l'Ours Premier, etc.), and Petite Joye, and we enter a universe of *précieux* and *précieuses* like Thémire, Daphnis, and Clorisandre. The *Pièces fugitives* generally present a much-less-realistic view of romantic love than d'Épinay's novel, but the image of an inner compass is here nonetheless.

First, it is in the *histoire galante* in poem form (which is labeled "conte" in the 1869 *Œuvres* edited by Challemel-Lacour), *Le Cadran de l'amour* (1758), also written during the

period when d'Épinay was likely writing *Montbrillant*. This work evokes the image of a watch face or meter dial in the soul that replaces a real watch. This inner dial is capable of reading the soul's positions. As the backstory story goes, a young woman, dressed as a man, had lost her pocket watch. It turns out that it had slipped "à la jarretière de sa culotte" without her noticing. A man with very bad eyesight, however, notices it and brings it to her attention. Love (Amour) takes pity on one of the characters and gifts her with a metaphorical *cadran*:

L'Amour, touché de son martyre,  
Vient, dit-on, de douer Thémire  
D'un cadran si mystérieux,  
Qu'invisible à tous autres yeux,  
A Moulineau seul il fera connaître  
Les tendres sentiments  
Et les doux mouvements  
Qu'au cœur de Thémire il fait naître.<sup>9</sup>

The image of a compass is even more explicit in the 1750 poem *Le Présent intéressé*, in which Amour gives one as a gift that the speaker can give to her unfaithful lover. The compass has the magical power to turn him back into a perfect lover once again, and a lantern and urn also have a role to play:

"Cette boussole ira retracer à ses yeux  
Que tout amant a son pôle comme elle ;  
Dès qu'il a pu toucher un cœur fidèle,  
C'est vers lui seul qu'il doit tourner ses vœux.  
Cette lanterne où brille une lumière pure,  
Guidera ses pas égarés ;  
Et dans l'urne seront serrés  
Tous les secrets d'une tendre aventure."<sup>10</sup> (188-189)

In these poems, there is nothing particularly unique about these John Donne-like images of a compass, and, in *Le Présent intéressé*, a lantern lighting the path. Plenty of poets used similar imagery to describe love pointing a lover in the right direction. What is more interesting from the

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<sup>9</sup> *Œuvres (Moments)*, 186-187.

<sup>10</sup> Love is speaking in this stanza, which is why the stanza is in quotation marks.

point of view of the present study is that these images reappear in the educational program d'Épinay was developing at the same time in which Émilie learns to read the positions of her soul.

### Les Lettres à mon fils

If we read *Montbrillant* side-by-side with d'Épinay's other pedagogical works, we can trace thematic continuities. First, there is *Les Lettres à mon fils*, an educational work in the form of letters to the author's young son. The first letter argues for the importance of sincerity in combating social ills and in making a meaningful life for oneself, major lessons in *Montbrillant*. In addition to the thematic similarity, d'Épinay also makes reference to *Montbrillant* in *Les Lettres à mon fils*. At the beginning of the Première Lettre, "De l'éducation," which is dated "ce premier Janvier 1756,"<sup>11</sup> she states:

Quelque envie que j'aie, mon cher fils, de me sacrifier entièrement au soin de votre éducation, je ne puis me livrer à tout ce que me dicte ma tendresse pour vous. Un enchaînement d'affaires, une santé faible et délicate, vos propres occupations, m'empêchent souvent de vous avoir auprès de moi, et m'ôtent la satisfaction de suivre avec exactitude vos études, et de partager jusqu'à votre loisir et vos amusements. Ne croyez pas cependant que je vous perde de vue dans les moments où nous sommes séparés. De ceux que ma mauvaise santé me laisse, une grande partie est employée à réfléchir sur les moyens de perfectionner votre éducation. J'avais entrepris un écrit assez considérable sur cette matière ; mais comme j'ai toujours tâché de vous présenter mes avis sous une forme naturelle et facile qui pût vous inspirer l'amour de vos devoirs, j'ai pris le parti de vous donner cet ouvrage en détail. (1-2)

It is not clear whether or not this "écrit assez considérable" is necessarily *Montbrillant*, but we know that *Montbrillant* is a lengthy, ambitious work, and we do not have another like it from the pen of d'Épinay before *Les Conversations d'Émilie*. Moreover, the words d'Épinay uses to describe this piece of writing seem to anticipate how, in a 1770 letter to the Abbé Galiani, she

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<sup>11</sup> *Lettres*, ed. Weinreb, 29.



talks about a work that editor Daniel Magetti has identified as most likely being *Montbrillant*: “un ouvrage très étendu que je me suis avisée de faire, que vous n’avez pas lu et que je veux que vous lisiez un jour, dussiez-vous en mourir d’ennui” (248). This letter identifies the work in question as a *roman d’idées* on the topic of the moral education of children. Thus, it is not improbable to think d’Épinay is referring to *Montbrillant* when she evokes the “écrit assez considerable” on the subject of education that she has already worked on by January 1, 1756.

If this reference is indeed to *Montbrillant*, it calls into question our ideas about the chronology of the two works. If the first letter is dated January 1, 1756, it makes us think that d’Épinay must have written a considerable portion of *Montbrillant* by the end of 1755. Weinreb dates *Montbrillant* to the period 1756-1762 and states that d’Épinay must have finished it before 1769 (*Eagle*, 72-73), although the evidence suggests that she was never truly satisfied with it, and therefore never finished it. *Lettres à mon fils*’ history is less in dispute, because the letters are dated, eight of the twelve were published in the *Correspondance littéraire*, and all twelve were published as a book in 1759. Scholars think that *Lettres à mon fils* and *Montbrillant* were written at around the same time, i.e. during the period when Rousseau lived on d’Épinay’s land in the Hermitage.<sup>12</sup> The last of the *Lettres* is dated October, 1758. Each of the *Lettres* contains one lesson distilled from *Montbrillant*. This is another reason why it is reasonable to think that d’Épinay might have written more of *Montbrillant* earlier than we think. However, there is some evidence in *Montbrillant* to suggest that d’Épinay may have indeed continued adding to it until 1762 and even 1769.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, two of the *Lettres* are included in *Montbrillant*, which would not be possible if the entire novel had been written before all of the *Lettres*. It is worth noting, however, that the two letters included are the first two d’Épinay wrote. The first, as we know, is

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Weinreb, *Eagle*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the notes in *Montbrillant*, 3:560.

dated January 1, 1756 and the second is dated March 1, 1756. Furthermore, they are included in *Montbrillant* almost two-thirds of the way through the novel.<sup>14</sup>

There is another reference in *Lettres à mon fils* that is likely to *Montbrillant*. This time, it is one that refers explicitly to *Montbrillant*. In the *Seconde Lettre*, “De la flatterie,” as part of a discussion opposing false and real praise, d’Épinay explains to her son that he is too young to deserve real praise yet; at his age, he can only show promise and needs encouragement. To drive home this point, she uses the extended metaphor of an *allée de tilleuls*, describing how they, too, show promise and that the gardener tends to them carefully and can see what they might develop into from the quality of their leaves, but that they have not yet achieved their full glory:

Le jardinier qui planta cette allée de tilleuls que vous voyez sur la terrasse de Montbrillant ne songe pas à les louer de l’ombre qu’ils ne sauraient encore donner; il se borne à une culture soigneuse, et leur procure tous les moyens de croître et de se fortifier; il retranche les rameaux qui pourraient détourner des branches principales les suc nécessaires de la sève ; il peut juger, si vous voulez, par la beauté des feuilles de ce que l’arbre pourra devenir un jour ; il se flatte dans le silence que ses soins prospéreront; mais il ne songe à vanter ses succès que lorsque, aidé par le temps et la culture, ce tilleul est devenu l’ornement du jardin de son maître. (29-30)

In the manuscript, d’Épinay wrote in the margin, near the word “Montbrillant,” “C’est le nom de mon roman” (29). Other scholars have attributed significance to this remark as d’Épinay’s birth, self-actualization, or coming out as a writer. D’Épinay printed *Lettres à mon fils* at her friend Gauffecourt’s private printing press near Geneva, in a town called Montbrillant. Thus, Mary Trouille explains, “[t]he fact that she chose to call her heroine by this name illustrates the importance this work represented to her. Madame de Montbrillant, the new self that d’Épinay created in her novel, was in a sense born through the experience of publishing her first book” (*Sexual Politics*, 143). This interpretation of Montbrillant as writerly apotheosis is compelling, but to it I would add another. In referencing her “roman,” could d’Épinay not simply be

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<sup>14</sup> See *Montbrillant*, 2:518-528.

referencing the “écrit assez considérable” that she had already mentioned in the first letter? If so, the garden metaphor takes on new significance. *Montbrillant* is like that garden with the lindens; d’Épinay’s model educator Émilie is the gardener, and Émilie’s children are like the trees. *Montbrillant* chronicles the years of their growth, the care (education) they were given, and how they turned out. It is also like a laboratory or greenhouse. The gardener experiments with different treatments and d’Épinay lets the reader know which methods yield the best results. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly when d’Épinay wrote the marginal note. Taken together with other evidence, however, it is not implausible that the “écrit assez considérable” that d’Épinay had already undertaken by January 1, 1756 was *Montbrillant*.

“C’est de la mode de dire du mal des femmes”: a 1756 Essay in the *Correspondance littéraire*

Further evidence that *Montbrillant* was written earlier than suggested by conventional wisdom comes from an essay that circulated in the 15 June 1756 issue of the *Correspondance littéraire*, the same issue in which the first of the *Lettres à mon fils* is included. We know that d’Épinay played a key role in the *CL*, and it seems possible and perhaps even likely that we may be able to attribute more articles or ideas to her as time goes on.<sup>15</sup> The *CL* served as a showcase for d’Épinay’s educational writings, with excerpts from *Lettres* and *Les Conversations d’Émilie*. The journal also reviewed many educational treatises, and found many of their authors’ precepts to be lacking when compared to d’Épinay’s ideas.

The 15 June 1756 issue opens with a long essay on women’s capacities, “C’est de la mode de dire du mal des femmes,” and proceeds to detail some of this *médiance*, singling out Rousseau in particular for his belief that women are born weak and that they must therefore be

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<sup>15</sup> See Kølving’s article and her new edition of the *CL* for more details on the attribution process and how scholars have recently uncovered more information about d’Épinay’s involvement.

granted less authority over their children than their fathers. The author of this article argues that Rousseau's reasoning might work for lions and tigers, who are granted rights in proportion to their strength, but that it is "contraire à la raison" to apply the same thinking to human beings and indeed, it is "indigne du partisan de l'égalité de toutes les conditions." After presenting the philosophical proof that demolishes Rousseau's argument, the author posits

deux principes incontestables. L'un, que la femme dans l'ordre physique et moral des choses, est ce qu'elle doit être, et qu'elle a tous les avantages et tous les inconvénients dont un être ainsi constitué doit se ressentir. L'autre, que les effets de la beauté et de l'amour, pour être imaginaires, ne sont pas moins réels, et feront le bonheur ou le malheur de l'homme, aussi longtemps que ses sens seront subordonnés à l'imagination. Tout ce qu'on peut dire d'ailleurs contre les femmes est dénué de raison et de philosophie. Tous les défauts qu'on peut leur reprocher, sont l'ouvrage des hommes, de la société et surtout d'une éducation mal entendue. (3:132-133)

We have seen that d'Épinay believed that it was possible to change a person's nature through education, but only up to a point. What she says about women here corresponds to this philosophy. Women are what they are, biologically and morally speaking. And what they are is not bad in the first place. Everything bad one could say about women is the fault of men, society, and a poor education. We have also seen that in one of *Montbrillant's* prefaces, d'Épinay states that society, and specifically education, makes women what they are, and weakens them. The education that Madame de Montbrillant had received "avait si bien déguisé ou affaibli ses dispositions naturelles qu'il a fallu un nombre d'années passée dans le malheur pour lui rendre la fermeté de son caractère" (1:4). D'Épinay again articulates this stance in an essay published in the *Correspondance littéraire* in 1772 as a response to a misogynist text by Antoine-Léonard Thomas.<sup>16</sup> The 1756 *Correspondance littéraire* article explains that this poorly conceived education takes place in convents, where young women learn nothing that will prepare them for

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<sup>16</sup> See Thomas, Diderot, and d'Épinay, *Qu'est-ce qu'une femme?*, 193 and Trouille, "Sexual/Textual Politics in the Enlightenment."

their married lives and that every aspect of society conspires in a young woman's moral ruin (134-135). As we know, *Montbrillant* also argues against putting women into convents for their education, because it leaves them unprepared for marriage, and the novel shows all the ways society can corrupt and crush a young woman, from her libertine best friend Mlle Darcy convincing Émilie to abandon her moral scruples, to the rumors that she caught syphilis because she had slept with everyone, to Mlle Darcy sleeping with her lover. What the *CL* essay describes so closely resembles the events in *Montbrillant* that we must think its author, Grimm, was heavily influenced in his thinking by his then-partner, d'Épinay. The essay even quotes the opinion of "une femme d'esprit," in other words, d'Épinay, who denigrates an educational treatise by another writer (135). The presence of *Montbrillant*-like content in this essay written in the same year that the current wisdom holds d'Épinay began writing her novel is more evidence that the novel was most likely conceived of as an educational work, one of whose aims was to show the inadequacy of the typical convent education. If we further consider the evidence that much of *Montbrillant* had been conceived of and written before 1756, then we must imagine d'Épinay looking over Grimm's shoulder as he wrote the *CL* article, or perhaps the two sitting side-by-side.

### Rousseau

Rousseau lived on d'Épinay's property from April, 1756 to December, 1757, and the two were friends before he moved in.<sup>17</sup> Although Rousseau distanced himself from his pedagogical predecessors, claiming that *Émile* is "tout neuf après le livre de Locke,"<sup>18</sup> Ruth Weinreb suggests

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<sup>17</sup> Weinreb, *Eagle*, 72-73, 79, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Gagnebin and others, 4:241.

that d'Épinay's *Lettres à mon fils* was a likely source of inspiration for *Émile* and part of *Julie*.<sup>19</sup> Rousseau was working on *Julie* during the period when their friendship was at its apogee. If d'Épinay had worked out the majority of the ideas in *Montbrillant*, and perhaps done a significant portion of the writing by the start of 1756, it seems she would have had to add to her novel to respond to *Julie*. I think that this is likely, and I think that one of the major conflicts between Rousseau and d'Épinay during these years was likely to have been the suitability of mothers for teaching their own children. If *Montbrillant* is, at least in some respects, a response to *Julie*, then *Émile* may be, at least in part, a response to *Montbrillant*. If many of *Montbrillant*'s ideas had been conceived of and much the novel *Montbrillant* even written by the time Rousseau moved on to d'Épinay's estate, this would mean that d'Épinay's conception of *Montbrillant* as an educational novel – the story of the education of Émilie – would have, of course, already been in place. In *Montbrillant*, d'Épinay performs a sort of thought experiment. She wants to see if it is possible to educate a young woman in such a way that she can simultaneously remain relatively virtuous, avoid victimization, and yet find fulfillment in a society that is corrupt. *Émile* arises from a similar inquiry. Of course, we might also think that since Rousseau was already developing his ideas for *Émile* during this period, d'Épinay might have been reacting against them in developing the story of Émilie. The flow of ideas between the two authors (and all the other authors who were writing on similar topics at the time) was undoubtedly complex, but the evidence suggests that there are new and exciting intertexts to be explored between *Montbrillant* and *Émile*.

#### ~1770-1772: The Period of Doubt

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<sup>19</sup> Weinreb, "Introduction," in d'Épinay, *Lettres à mon fils*, ed. by Weinreb, 13, 16-17.

In addition to d'Épinay's other educational works, other evidence in favor of reading *Montbrillant* as *roman pédagogique* comes from two letters from the 1770s. In them, d'Épinay refers to disagreements she had had with Rousseau 15 years earlier and seems to concede that he was right and she was wrong. Reading these letters alongside *Montbrillant* sheds new light both on the letters and the novel.

In the earlier letter, from d'Épinay to the Abbé Galiani, dated 2 septembre 1770, d'Épinay states that she always doubts herself (“j’ai la sotte habitude de me défier toujours de mes idées lorsqu’elles ne sont pas confirmées par les gens en qui j’ai confiance”) and defers to others’ ideas on education, specifically those of “Mrs les infaillibles.” However, she feels reassured by Galiani’s approbation and also her own experiences educating her relatives:

J’ai déjà fait cinq éducations tant de mes enfants que de pauvres parents dont je me suis chargée, aucuns n’ont réussi que ceux que j’ai forcés par l’application et l’assiduité à vaincre les difficultés. J’élève actuellement mes petits-enfants, je me proposai cette rigueur avec eux, et certainement, ils y passeront. (1:247-248)

In *Montbrillant*, Émilie is confronted with the voices of naysayers who do not believe she knows how best to educate her children and who ridicule her for not following convention and for not handing them over to others to educate them. Some of these voices are her family members, and others are the leading educational thinkers of the day, including characters based on Rousseau, Duclos, and others (whom we might think of as “Mrs les infaillibles”). The novel documents Émilie’s process of testing out her methods and theirs and comparing the results. Ultimately, her experiences confirm her earliest instincts on the best form of education for her children. The process that d'Épinay describes herself going through in the letter to Galiani is very similar to what she puts Émilie through with respect to the educational ideas of others and the ultimate triumph of her own lived experience as a mother. (In contrast, the educational experts she consults are men without children, or who do not raise their own children.) In the letter to

Galiani, d'Épinay says their pedagogical books are worthless then goes on to ascribe an explicitly educational motive to her novel, the one, in other words, that is the “ouvrage très étendu que je me suis avisée de faire”:

dans cet ouvrage dis-je, j'ai mis en question, (à propos de l'éducation morale qu'on pouvait donner aux hommes), s'il fallait les élever, s'ils étaient faits pour être élevés, et si l'état de la société (tel qu'il est) permettait aux pères de donner de l'éducation morale à leurs enfants ? (1:247-248)<sup>20</sup>

Here we see *Montbrillant* explicitly identified as a sort of *roman d'idées* or *roman pédagogique* that grapples with questions including whether children can be raised and educated (and, especially, whether or not they can be given a moral education), and whether parents can be the ones to do it. These are the central questions in *Montbrillant*, which is like a laboratory, in which over time, the reader sees whether or not such an education is possible. In this letter, likely written after most if not all of *Montbrillant* was written,<sup>21</sup> d'Épinay also states what conclusion she came to regarding parents giving their own children a moral education, and she does not answer in the affirmative:

Eh bien j'ai osé conclure que non à moins qu'il ne fût bien reconnu qu'il fallait leur apprendre à être honnêtement vicieux. Ma foi, cela s'apprend tout seul, la nature vous mène droit au vice, l'expérience vous rend honnête ou le plus honnêtement vicieux qu'il est possible, ou en d'autres termes rend faux les gens mal nés et prudentes les âmes droites. Voilà en deux mots la petite thèse que j'ai établie et que j'ai mise à la vérité sur la bouche d'un homme calqué un peu sur Jean-Jacques. (1:248-249)<sup>22</sup>

In this passage, we see d'Épinay admitting to putting words in Rousseau's mouth, but while we also see that her character René is only “calqué un peu sur Jean-Jacques,” some of what she has René say is quite different from the opinions Rousseau espoused. Her descriptions here of

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<sup>20</sup> The parentheses in this passage are d'Épinay's.

<sup>21</sup> Again, we must remember that d'Épinay considered it in some sense incomplete and left it for Grimm to finish at the time of her death (*Montbrillant*, 1:ix).

<sup>22</sup> We have already seen the next part of the letter, in which d'Épinay speculates that people would think ill of her if they read “this letter” (which seems to refer to the “petite thèse”) and goes on to reflect on the tendency of readers to judge authors by the characters they create.



children naturally learning to be vicious and nature leading straight to vice are the reverse of Rousseau's positions on man in the state of nature. For d'Épinay, instead of corrupting, it is experience that makes people honest, and as we will see, in a letter by her addressed perhaps to Diderot, society might also fill this role.

The other letter that may reference *Montbrillant* is contained in Diderot's *Correspondance*.<sup>23</sup> Its editor, Georges Roth, (who also edited the 1951 edition of *Montbrillant*), tentatively dates this letter 1772, but admits that it was undated and that the letter to which it is ostensibly a response has never been found. He also notes that there are similarities between this letter and a passage from *Montbrillant* thought to date from 1757.<sup>24</sup> In this letter, d'Épinay refers to “une conversation que j'eus il y a quinze ans avec Jean-Jacques” in which Rousseau claims that parents are unfit to raise their own children and children unfit to be raised; her description of the conversation matches the c. 1757 *Montbrillant* passage in question, and thus Roth dates the letter 1772. In this letter, we see a continuation of the pessimistic tone regarding the possibility of educating children that we saw in the letter to Galiani. D'Épinay begins by underscoring her belief in the truth of the “tristes maximes de morale” of Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld et La Bruyère, “cette vérité, [qu']ils [ont] puisée dans la recherche de la société, telle qu'elle est instituée.” D'Épinay believes that men are born neither “vicieux” nor “vertueux” but “généralement susceptible de besoins, facile et imitateur.” She says that she knows nothing of “l'homme sauvage,” but she knows that she does not trust anything coming from “l'homme civilisé” that she has not carefully examined and thought about herself. Society as it is set up, she

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<sup>23</sup> The letter might be intended for Diderot or for someone else. Roth explains that some of these letters are for other people but have been mixed in... (12:9-10).

<sup>24</sup> Scholars think it dates from 1757 because of parallels to events in d'Épinay's life. But is important to note that shortly before this passage appears in the text, d'Épinay includes the *Lettre à la gouvernante de ma fille*, dating from 1756. It is somewhat difficult to assign dates to each passage.

says, does not allow civilized man to be anything other than La Rochefoucauld depicts him: “Je dis donc qu’un être susceptible de besoins, facile et imitateur, jeté dans la société telle qu’elle est instituée, ne peut qu’être tel que le peignent La Rochefoucault, Montaigne et La Bruyère.”

However, by showing people as they actually are, it may be possible to bring them to have indulgence for one another, since they can be modified somewhat, though not fundamentally changed (“Il est bien fait de le montrer tel qu’il est;<sup>25</sup> cela doit au moins le porter à l’indulgence, et c’est le seul bon parti qu’on puisse tirer de lui, car il est susceptible de modifications”). The letter reviews many of the same themes we saw in the letter to Galiani written two years earlier. Again we see reference to “l’homme sauvage,” and again d’Épinay seems to be implicitly criticizing Rousseau’s ideas on the subject, saying that she cannot comment on *l’homme sauvage* because she has not seen him with her own eyes. She states that living in society was a “first necessity” from which all others follow,<sup>26</sup> and that humans are what they will be (“nous serons toujours ce que nous sommes” – there is similar language in the essay attributed to Grimm in the *Correspondance littéraire* on the subject of women’s education).

D’Épinay concludes that Rousseau was right that parents are unfit to teach their own children: “Je manquois d’expérience alors; j’avois encore toute l’illusion et l’enthousiasme que produit la vertu dans une âme honnête; aussi cette opinion me révolta. Mais maintenant le voile est déchiré; j’en suis fâchée; Jean-Jacques a raison, philosophe, et je conclus que vous êtes plus jeune que moi, quoique j’aye une bonne dizaine d’années de moins que vous” (28-30).

It is quite possible that the reference to a conversation with Jean-Jacques fifteen years earlier is in fact also a reference to *Montbrillant*, to the conversation in which René tells Émilie

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<sup>25</sup> This phrase uses similar language to that which we have seen in one of *Montbrillant*’s prefaces.

<sup>26</sup> The idea in this passage that man is inherently sociable is reminiscent of Montesquieu.

that parents cannot educate their own children, an opinion that horrifies Émilie (3:135-136), like the reaction d'Épinay says she herself had to the suggestion. Seen in this light, this letter constitutes yet another indication that d'Épinay's novel aimed to explore these very questions. One reason this letter is significant is that in the letter to Galiani, it sounded like the message of *Montbrillant* was perhaps intended to be that René was right and Émilie wrong, whereas in the Diderot letter it is clear that, at the time d'Épinay was writing *Montbrillant*, she fundamentally believed in Émilie's message and thus had only later in life come to reject this message in favor of Rousseau's stance.

We should note that this letter includes the words "Perfectionner l'éducation!" before discussing how preposterous such an idea is (29). These words are a clear echo of the goal d'Épinay sets forth in *Les Lettres à mon fils*, in which she claims to spend the majority of her free time thinking about "les moyens de perfectionner votre éducation." These references in d'Épinay's correspondence form a web of intertextual links between *Lettres à mon fils* and *Montbrillant*, suggesting that in letter to Galiani above, d'Épinay may very likely be referring to *Montbrillant* as that work that is "très étendu" – language that echoes her description, in *Lettres*, of a work that is "considérable" – and moreover, as a work that was explicitly intended to treat the topic of education, specifically, whether or not it is possible, and the best method to use.

In the letters to Galiani and Diderot, d'Épinay seems to concede that René was right that in fact parents could not teach their children. This conclusion does not, however, harmonize with the message in *Montbrillant*, and d'Épinay returns to parents educating their own children – mothers, specifically, educating their daughters – in *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, published for the first time in 1774, not long after these two letters.

### Les Conversations d'Émilie

D'Épinay's later educational novel, *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, establishes continuity with *Montbrillant* by reusing the name Émilie and contains the main arguments from *Montbrillant* in a distilled form. *Conversations* is written in the form of a dialogue between mother and daughter who often read together out loud and pause to comment on what they are reading. Oftentimes, the stories involve contrasting characters who serve as types illustrating certain moral lessons. One story that La Mère tells Émilie, for example, features Julie, who is very pretty and of noble extraction, but has no money, and has a terrible attitude, in contrast to her brother, who can do no wrong and for whose career what little family money there is will be spent. Julie's mother exhorts her to work on herself and develop her virtues *so that Julie can get married*:

Elle lui dit un jour : mon enfant, je ne suis point riche, je viens de m'épuiser pour faire entrer votre frère au service. Jusqu'à présent il s'est distingué des jeunes gens de son âge par sa sagesse et son émulation; il fera son chemin, je l'espère, et il pourra un jour vous être utile. Mais pour vous, vous n'avez rien, je ne suis point en état de vous donner des maîtres, ni de vous procurer des talents agréables. Ce n'est donc que de vos vertus, de votre émulation à acquérir les qualités qui vous manquent, que vous pouvez attendre votre bonheur. Je vous aiderai des lumières que l'expérience et la connoissance du monde m'ont données. Si vous ne vous faites pas estimer et chérir; si vous n'intéressez pas par vos qualités personnelles, vous ne trouverez point d'établissement; vous ne vous marierez pas. (58)

This story serves as an important pretext for Émilie's mother to drive home a lesson about getting married when you have nothing:

ÉMILIE – Pourquoi, Maman, cette dame lui disait-elle cela?

LA MÈRE – Parce qu'elle n'était pas riche, et que quand on n'a rien, il faut être meilleure qu'une autre, pour être recherchée : car si vous êtes pauvre et méchante, on a une raison de plus de vous laisser-là. (59)

Unfortunately, Julie does nothing to improve herself, word of her horrible personality spreads far and wide, and she gets to spend perpetuity in a convent, alone, and five-year-old Émilie begins to

see the importance of developing her character if she does not want to end up like Julie (59). To underscore the importance of this course of action, her mother repeatedly tells Émilie rather bluntly that unlike Julie in the story, she will not have beauty to rely on (60-62). Émilie then wants to know why her mother's visitors always tell her she is pretty if she is not, which leads to a lesson about the insincerity of social politeness (62). Émilie promises to work hard to "perfect" herself in order to deserve the compliments (and by extension, marriage), and a discussion follows on how Émilie can improve her behavior (62-63). This same lesson about penniless girls working to perfect themselves in order to snag a husband is repeated elsewhere in *Conversations*, as we saw earlier in the discussion of d'Épinay's Pauline figure. The necessity of developing personal qualities to compensate for the lack of a dowry is the major lesson of *Montbrillant*, and its repeated use in an avowed educational work indicates that like *Conversations*, *Montbrillant* is also a pedagogical work. In light of this reading, there are more interesting intertextual links to be made between *Montbrillant* and *Conversations*, and between *Montbrillant*'s list of "changements à faire à la fable," which mentions didactic stories that were not developed in *Montbrillant*, and *Conversations*.

### Conclusions

Thinking of *Montbrillant* as an educational novel changes the way we read other works by d'Épinay and opens up possibilities for new directions in intertextual analysis. Rethinking *Montbrillant* forces us to rethink other authors' texts as well, not only parts of the *Correspondance littéraire*, where we now perhaps see the contributions of d'Épinay where we did not before, but also *Émile*, in the genesis of which d'Épinay's ideas may have played a part.

Reading *Montbrillant* as primarily an educational novel will have repercussions elsewhere in Rousseau scholarship, too. For many years, a letter has been included in published versions of Rousseau's *Correspondance*, in which Rousseau seems to chastise d'Épinay, telling her that her letters to her son, aged nine, will be virtually "useless" to him because they are too "difficult" for him to understand at his age (they concern moral development), and moreover, they are too "preachy" and "dry." The problem with including this letter in Rousseau's *Correspondance* is that it actually comes from *Montbrillant*, in which the character René writes it. Ralph A. Leigh, an editor of Rousseau's *Correspondance*, admits that "l'authenticité de cette lettre [...] n'est donc pas certaine; mais elle reste possible, les idées exposées ici offrant une certaine ressemblance avec celles de l'*Émile*" (3:184). Leigh's decision to include it is steeped in the old thinking about *Montbrillant*: that it is a memoir and that in spite of its various departures from the truth, it is trustworthy enough to use as a guide for establishing historical fact. But we know that René is not an entirely faithful portrait of Rousseau. Leigh's approach to *Montbrillant* (1966) reflects the long-lasting influence of the nineteenth-century editors who inserted some of d'Épinay's non-fictional letters and documents into the novel as well as the influence of editor Georges Roth's painstaking work to match *Montbrillant*'s content to reality. The consequences, then, of reading *Montbrillant* as an educational novel do not only apply to our view of d'Épinay and her work. There are also repercussions impacting what we know – or think we know – about Rousseau.

D'Épinay collaborated with many writers and her influence was far-reaching. The stories we currently tell about her role likely do not reflect the nuances of the actual collaborations. Following some of these webs where they lead helps us better to understand the questions with which many Enlightenment writers were grappling.

## Chapter Ten: *Montbrillant* and the *Miroir des princes*

This chapter considers *Montbrillant* as part of a project intended as a *miroir des princes*. I argue that *Montbrillant* was part of a larger project of d'Épinay and Grimm's in the 1750s: to convince the elite readers of the *Correspondance littéraire* that they themselves should pursue truth in certain ways and that they should institute a new kind of education among their peoples, one based on a deist catechism founded on the love of virtue and truth. This new form of education would teach people to read their inner moral compasses, which would lead them ever more surely in the direction of virtue and truth. Eight of d'Épinay's twelve *Lettres à mon fils* were published in the *CL* in 1756-1758. Each of the *Lettres*, which were written in the same period as *Montbrillant*, distills one of the novel's themes into a few short pages, allowing d'Épinay to expose the moral of *Montbrillant*'s story in 120 pages instead of 2,000. The short letters were published incrementally in the *CL*, allowing readers to absorb their message gradually. *Les Lettres à mon fils* may be considered a key to understanding *Montbrillant*, and d'Épinay's thoughts on sincerity in *Lettres* further elucidate the messages in her novel.

Grimm and d'Épinay worked closely together on the *Correspondance littéraire*, and *Montbrillant* contains similar sentiments to the thoughts on women's education expressed in the 1756 *Correspondance littéraire* and to the ideal form of an educational work discussed in one of the 1762 issues. Now, in examining issues from 1755, we will see that sincerity was a central concern and was even the basis of a secular educational catechism set forth by Grimm. Based on our evidence, it is likely that d'Épinay was developing *Montbrillant* in 1755, and for this and other reasons, it is impossible to say for sure that Grimm's catechism is a precursor to d'Épinay's novel. It seems likely, rather, that the two thinkers exchanged ideas on this subject. However, in his 1755 essays, Grimm issues a call for someone to write the right kind of catechism and to

develop the proper form of education for children, and his call is arguably for a philosophy of education based on sincerity. We may see d'Épinay as responding to this call in the works she was writing at this time, *Montbrillant* and *Les Lettres à mon fils*.

### Sincerity in 1755 Issues of the *Correspondance littéraire*

In a string of essays in the 1755 *Correspondance littéraire*, Grimm issues a call for humankind to renew and perfect itself by pursuing truth in new ways. One way to do this would be to be more virtuous, and the way to become more virtuous lay in a new system of education. In this new system, children would first cultivate a secular version of virtue, before being exposed to the precepts of the Church. Grimm, however, co-opts a well-known Catholic form, catechism, in order to teach secular virtue, and calls upon others to continue this work of developing a new pedagogy. D'Épinay responded to this call.

Grimm opens the February 1, 1755 issue of the *Correspondance littéraire* with a strongly worded essay about the truth, which begins:

De tous les arts, le plus ignoré et le plus mal exercé est celui de la dispute. Rien ne serait plus propre à l'établissement et aux progrès de la vérité parmi les hommes que la voie de la discussion, si nous avons un désir constant et sincère de discerner le vrai d'avec le faux, d'adopter l'un et de rejeter l'autre, sans songer ni aux torts imaginaires que nous croyons quelquefois nous faire par l'aveu de la vérité, ni aux avantages passagers et futiles que l'erreur semble souvent procurer à ses partisans. (479)<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, we see some themes emerge that are constants or underlying principles, which, although modified, are present throughout our reading of d'Épinay. One is that Grimm seems to be referring to an objective truth that is linked to progress that human beings can try to discover, but only if they have a “sincere desire” to distinguish the true from the false. Second, the truth is always right and good, while falsehood is always bad, and whatever advantages it seems to

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<sup>1</sup> All references to the *CL* in this chapter refer to the Tourneux edition.



promise are mere illusions. According to this way of thinking, “l’aveu de la vérité” cannot do any true harm, only “torts imaginaires.” Later in his essay, he goes on to say that “[...] il n’y a point de vérité dangereuse ni nuisible” (485). Here we might hear an echo of d’Épinay’s words in *Lettres*, expressing the opinion that, for the sincere person, “quelle que soit la diversité de ses opinions, il ne pourra dans aucun cas blesser des juges équitables en disant la sienne” (127).<sup>2</sup> This position also bears some similarity to that of *Le Misanthrope*’s Alceste or Rousseau defending Alceste, in that it reveals sympathy for the person who risks speaking the truth even when it might seem to do harm.

Grimm goes on to explain that the human spirit naturally “ne saurait être ennemi de la vérité” and that it is only “ses passions, ses prétentions, sa vanité, sa fureur de système et de singularité” that blind human beings to it (479). Further, people shield themselves from the truth by enveloping themselves in “d’épais nuages” – by distorting and using artifice to hide the light of truth that is clearly perceived by their eyes. All it takes to be a disciple of truth, says Grimm, is “droiture” and “bonne foi” (479). People with these qualities will surpass even renowned philosophers in their quest for truth, for, unfortunately, in the philosophers’ “fameuses querelles,” very little truth is to be found, but a lot of “vain et insipide bavardage” (479). The true vocation of philosophers, Grimm says, should be to discover the truth and share it with their fellow beings (“[l]e philosophe, je le répète, doit se contenter de montrer la vérité: c’est là sa vraie vocation, elle est sublime” (483)), and philosophers must leave truth in its “sublime et majestueuse simplicité” instead of complicating things with a lot of “artifices”: “[i]l vaudrait encore mieux à l’homme de n’avoir jamais connu la vérité que de la voir dans les atours de

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<sup>2</sup> References to *Lettres* in this chapter only are from the Challemel-Lacour edition.

l'erreur et du mensonge" (480). From there, Grimm launches into a critique of a philosopher (Collins) who has, unfortunately, done the latter.

The theme of the search for truth seems to have still been on Grimm's mind when he prepared the next issue (February 15, 1755), in which he discusses what sets human beings apart from other animals, in his opinion, "la perfectibilité" (492). Unfortunately, explains Grimm, man has not made good use of the gift of perfectibility "qu'il a reçu de la nature." Instead, from his very first steps, he has wandered far from what nature intended (492). Fortunately, people regret their blindness with regard to the law of nature, "si simple et si claire," and wonder at how it could have been "méconnue et négligée si longtemps" (493). However, now that they realize the error of their ways, people are wasting their time with regrets instead of doing something to correct the situation. There is only one remedy that can lead to perfection, and this is enlightened education: "[c]es réflexions, justifiées et confirmées tous les jours par l'expérience, devraient bien nous engager à songer au seul remède à tant de maux, qui est une éducation éclairée digne d'un être raisonnable et qui doit aspirer à la perfection" (493). Such an education would put people back in touch with "la raison" and "la vérité," from which force of habit, laziness, and obstinacy have separated them, and he hopes that a wise person will provide an educational treatise that will light the way:

Il faut espérer qu'à la fin les hommes commenceront à faire des essais sur la science de l'éducation, et à se communiquer leurs observations et leurs expériences; ce qui mettra les sages parmi eux en état de faire un traité d'éducation dont il nous manque encore les premiers éléments, et de nous montrer à quel degré de perfection et d'excellence la nature peut parvenir lorsqu'elle est secourue dans son premier âge. (493-494)

Grimm uses the same images of blindness, error, and light in his February 1 essay on truth and in this February 15 call for a new method of education ("si le funeste bandeau qui nous couvre les yeux et nous dérobe la lumière pour connaître nos vrais intérêts pouvait tomber [...]"). In both

cases, he describes human beings obstinately falling into error and willfully turning their backs on what is natural, right, and true. It is as if, in this later issue, this new type of education takes the place of the search for truth in the earlier essay. We might therefore see the search for truth, including the ethical imperative for the philosopher to reveal the truth – and for people to be sincere in their desire to discern the truth – as the basis of this method of education.

Grimm states that he does not have time in his February 15 issue to fully develop his ideas on education, but he does explore one aspect that he believes should be central. He objects to the practice of teaching children religious principles from the cradle, and believes that they should first be given a foundation of secular “reason,” “virtue,”<sup>3</sup> and an understanding of how people should interact and what they owe each other in society. Only then, Grimm says, should religious ideas be introduced:

[...] c’est renverser tout l’ordre et la gradation de nos connaissances que de commencer par la religion. C’est par les connaissances humaines qu’il faut s’élever aux connaissances divines. C’est après s’être étudié comme ce qu’il y a de plus précieux, que l’homme commence à regarder autour de lui, à réfléchir sur son semblable, sur les créatures qui l’environnent, sur la nature qu’il contemple, sur l’univers qu’il envisage, et enfin sur la divinité qu’il suppose.

[...] Il faut [...] élever nos enfants à la vertu, à l’honnêteté, avant que de leur parler du christianisme ; il faut les rendre bons et vertueux avant que de les rendre dévots. Il faut leur prêcher l’amour des hommes avant que de leur parler de l’amour de Dieu. (495)

Grimm’s position implies a divorce of reason and virtue from religious precepts, in that he assumes that the former can have a secular basis that can be inculcated first. We again see the idea of truth as a fixed, objective reality outside the human being, because Grimm argues that once a child has a firm foundation in reason and virtue, when he then learns about religion at a more mature age, he will be able to choose unerringly the true religion (494-495). One problem with teaching religion first and secular virtues later is that when people decide to abandon

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<sup>3</sup> 495.

religion, “on cesse ordinairement d’être honnête homme en cessant d’être chrétien” (495). Citing Charron, Grimm explains that the solution lies in becoming an *honnête homme* first and a Christian second. Another problem is that Christians learn how to simply do empty rituals while “dispensing with all the virtues” and the “devoirs les plus importants et les plus sacrés” (496). In *Montbrillant*, while d’Épinay will have Pauline learn her catechism from an early age, the author strongly emphasizes that Pauline must be given the opportunity to ask questions about it and never be forced simply to memorize it unthinkingly, which is one way to avoid falling into this trap.

Grimm provides another solution, which is a prototype for how to reuse Catholic forms in the service of building secular values in children. Grimm would argue, however, that his aims are not opposed to those of religion. On the contrary, Grimm argues that Christians have replaced virtue with empty rituals and therefore “Il faudrait [...] commencer à reformer le premier livre que nous donnons à nos enfants, qui est le catéchisme, ou plutôt il en faudrait faire un nouveau bien différent de celui qui ennuie et tourmente le petit peuple” (496). The first new catechism would teach children “les droits et les devoirs de l’humanité.” The second would teach children “les droits et les devoirs de la société, et les lois du gouvernement et du pays où ils sont nés.” Montesquieu could have written it, Grimm says, and he hopes another wise person will come forward to do it. In the meantime, Grimm will furnish his own propositions. Grimm thus presents his “ESSAI D’UN CATÉCHISME POUR LES ENFANTS.” This fifteen-point creed is written in a child’s voice. Some of the main themes include doing the right thing because it is right but also “agréable à faire” (497), respecting nature in all its power and “immensity” (497), loving one’s fellow man and treating him right (and living in society – “j’embellirai mon existence de celle des autres”) (497), respecting the works of man (498), and providing help to others in need

(497). Truth and virtue are mentioned several times throughout the document, which begins and ends with them. In his first point Grimm writes, “Qu’il est doux d’exister, de penser, de sentir! J’existerai pour obéir à la nature, je penserai pour connaître la vérité, je sentirai pour aimer la vertu” (496). He returns to this theme again a third of the way through the list: “O vérité! sois la lumière de mon esprit; ô vertu! sois la seule nourriture de mon âme; ô bienveillance! ô amour! ô amitié! soyez la seule occupation de ma vie” (497). In point 13, Grimm mentions admiring “les travaux et les vertus de l’homme,” in 14 he states, “[I]a vertu vaut mieux que la vie, parce qu’elle rend l’homme heureux, et qu’il ne faut vivre que pour être heureux,” and he ends 15, his last dictum, with “[I]a fausseté sera loin de mon cœur ; le mensonge ne sera point dans ma bouche, parce que je gagnerai à me montrer tel que je suis” (498). This last word shares a similar point of view to d’Épinay’s definition of sincerity from *Lettres*, cited above, namely the idea that a person will gain from being sincere. For d’Épinay, a person would gain “public esteem.” The words “me montrer tel que je suis” bear similarity to a phrase d’Épinay uses in *Montbrillant*’s second preface: Émilie wants to share her letters with her tutor because she wants to “paraître telle que je suis” (1:6-8). Grimm’s and d’Épinay’s words also foreshadow Rousseau’s claim before God from his *Confessions* that “[j]e me suis montré tel que je fus; méprisable et vil quand je l’ai été, bon, généreux, sublime, quand je l’ai été: j’ai dévoilé mon intérieur tel que tu l’as vu toi-même.”<sup>4</sup> This group of associates was very much interested in sincerity back in 1755 (and back then Rousseau was very much part of the group). Finally this last point is not only about truth; it is about sincerity. For Grimm, sincerity seems to be the basis of society. Virtue and truth are the glue in his catechism that allow men to care about each others’ happiness, which makes society function, and it is clear from his February 1, 1755 essay, as well as the last point in his

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<sup>4</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Confessions*. T. 1. Ed. Alain Grosrichard. Paris: Flammarion, 2002; 29-30.

catechism that part of seeking truth means “me montrer tel que je suis” (498) – in other words, sincerity is an important part.

We see a convergence with Grimm’s ideas on replacing the Catholic catechism with a secular one in d’Épinay’s redeployment of Catholic habits of mind, stripped of their religious content. Although young Pauline learns the Catholic catechism, the self-examination exercises she does in order to become more sincere and the rule she follows are divorced from Catholic dogma – they are not in any way presented as part of a faith tradition. To the extent that being sincere could be considered a characteristic of the *honnête homme*, these rituals, hollowed of their Catholic significance, could be used in the training of *honnêtes hommes* and *femmes*. Like Grimm, d’Épinay, too, will present a vision of the human as a being that perceives truth naturally, through a kind of inner moral compass.<sup>5</sup> For her, a person can become alienated from herself and learn to read her compass inaccurately. A true moral education consists in putting oneself back in touch with this compass. D’Épinay’s education in sincerity is one way to accomplish this.

Like Grimm, who advocates having young people learn first about themselves, then about their fellow humans, then about the environment, d’Épinay has Émilie encourage Pauline, herself encourages her son, and, in *Les Conversations d’Émilie*, has La Mère encourage Émilie, to think carefully about other people and to realize that all people are fundamentally alike in deserving to be treated with dignity and respect. The young characters must also think about nature and observe relationships between other creatures, including insects, and must learn to have compassion for and alleviate the suffering of animals. D’Épinay teaches, for example, that a

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<sup>5</sup> We will see this idea carry through into the work of educators who are considered and/or who counted themselves among the heritors of Rousseau – and who must in turn be considered the heritors of d’Épinay’s thought – including Maria Montessori, who also believed in the existence of an inner moral compass whose sensitivity could be cultivated.

child should be taught not to rip the wings off of flies and not to crush insects for sport. These social relationships with other humans and with the environment flow from a person's relationship with herself – her discernment of her own inner truth – and her ability to be sincere with herself and others.

In the March 15 issue of the *Correspondance littéraire*, Grimm again returns to the theme of virtue, this time in connection with the theme of commerce. He begins by commenting on a number of treatises on commerce by English authors (506-507). He then discusses the notion that a State should consider the effects of its system of commerce on its people, and wonders if any good can come from the race to amass the greatest wealth possible and get it into the hands of a few individuals (507-508). He twice says that virtue has fallen out of fashion (508; 509), but stresses that cultivating virtue, through the right kind of education, is the only way to save a State and ensure the happiness of its people (508-509). Grimm goes on to argue that virtue makes every aspect of a person's life better (509) and that a nation's taste is linked to its virtue, and that losing its virtue, it loses its ability to judge works of art (509-510). In making this argument, Grimm comes close to linking nobility and virtue, suggesting that “l'élite d'une nation, c'est-à-dire les plus honnêtes gens” are “les juges les plus éclairés” because “[l]a peinture, la musique, la poésie, tout ce qui consiste dans la beauté de l'imitation, est senti bien plus vivement par une âme honnête, parce qu'il n'y a qu'elle qui connaisse le véritable beau par le sentiment” (510). Then Grimm asks “Est-il bien vrai que ce soit l'or et l'argent qui font la véritable richesse d'un pays?” (510) and he concludes that the answer is no; the riches of a State are its people (511). The more people a State has, the more industry it will have. But, asks Grimm, is industry equally good for all states? And he again concludes that the answer is no (511). Industry only leads to corruption and ruin in states that do not have sufficient population to sustain it. Otherwise, it

draws peasants away from the countryside and agriculture, which people will flee when they are crushed by taxes (“écrasée sous le fardeau des impôts” (511-512)). Though his remarks on commerce may seem disconnected from his remarks about virtue and education, Grimm uses a *champ lexical* of virtue and corruption in his descriptions of commerce and agriculture. Being a *laquais* or *valet* is “le métier vil, mais plus lucratif” than being a farmer, which is “la profession la plus utile et la seule nécessaire dans un pays” (511-512). Grimm describes the farmers as those who provide a country’s food and uses the evocative image of a son leaving his father’s field to make a living in the city, saying “c’est ainsi que les villes se peuplent tandis que les campagnes se dépouillent, et que l’État languit et dépérit dans le temps qu’il a l’air d’avoir le plus de vie, de force et de vigueur. C’est donc l’agriculture qu’un prince éclairé et sage songera à encourager, avant que de songer au commerce” (511-512). Because its people make up the true wealth of a State, a virtuous people, Grimm implies, makes for a wealthier State. Not only can the sovereign give his people the right kind of virtue-based education, but he can also encourage them to remain agricultural workers through his policies, including his system of taxation. People will not remain farmers if they are crushed by taxes and if farming, the only necessary profession “n’est non-seulement pas profitable, mais devient nuisible à ceux qui l’exercent” (511-512). D’Épinay, too, connects virtue, education, and taxation in *Montbrillant*. She would have children receive an education that instills virtue, and through it reform the French State, including an overhaul of taxation. In *Les Lettres à mon fils*, she again advocates agricultural activity as the basis of a virtuous State. In this regard, both Grimm and d’Épinay participate in a long French tradition linking sincerity to agriculture, which finds its most emblematic example, perhaps, in Fénelon’s *Télémaque*.



When Grimm speaks about what “le souverain de la plus petite contrée de l’Europe” (508) or “un prince éclairé” (512) would ideally do to guarantee “le salut d’un État” (508), he is talking about the very people who were reading the *Correspondance littéraire*, including heads of state in Germany, Sweden, and Poland. His 1755 essays can thus be read as a call to action. He is trying to inspire them to instill virtue in their people, and he presents and builds on his arguments in short, concentrated, relentless doses in this series of issues of the journal. When d’Épinay then begins publishing *Les Lettres à mon fils* letter-by-letter in the *Correspondance littéraire* beginning with the first letter on January 1, 1756 and ending with the last on October 1, 1758, and later publishes excerpts from *Les Conversations d’Émilie* in the journal, we may understand these contributions not simply as a coincidence or as one part of what seems at times to be a smattering of different topics all of which were interesting and timely to the readers and writers at the time – thrown together seemingly somewhat randomly –, but instead as part of a concerted effort and coordinated program to present an idealized form of education to people in power. Scholars have suggested that *Les Lettres à mon fils* and *Les Conversations d’Émilie* were intended as models for mothers to follow,<sup>6</sup> and mothers certainly seem to be a plausible target audience. However, besides arguing that sovereigns should stimulate virtue among their peoples through education, Grimm’s essays are also a call to action for someone to write a new kind of pedagogical method in line with his philosophy. D’Épinay responds to this call, and we must consider that sovereigns were also part of her target audience, or even that they were her primary target audience.

Because *Lettres* and *Conversations* distill the ideas from *Montbrillant*, we can read the novel as part of this project to develop an idealized form of education that could change states

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<sup>6</sup> Badinter, for example, suggests in *Ambition* that other mothers were the intended audience of *Lettres à mon fils*.

for the better. Reading it as such shows what a very large preoccupation this was for d'Épinay and Grimm, and likely for other members of their group in 1755, including Rousseau in these years before the publication of *Émile*. D'Épinay and Grimm's focus on education at this time has not been adequately studied, and although it will be for another project or for other scholars to re-read *Émile* in a new light through some of Rousseau's then-associates' texts, I will simply suggest that Rousseau may have drawn some of the inspiration for his famous *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* from d'Épinay and Grimm's project. Other texts in the *CL*, such as a 1756 catechism for princes on how to rule, which also focuses on virtue and truth, also provide interesting intertexts to consider and can further our understanding of Grimm and d'Épinay's project as a *miroir des princes*.

### *Les Lettres à mon fils*

*Les Lettres à mon fils*, two-thirds of which appeared in the *CL*, presents all the main themes of *Montbrillant* in short, easy-to-digest pieces. D'Épinay begins by inscribing *Lettres* into the tradition of mothers teaching their own children, claiming that she learned all the wisdom contained in the letters from her own mother. She states that truth is part of her method, linking it to sincerity and virtue (21). She stresses the importance of having models to emulate and learning from examples (17). Examples instruct better than precepts, she says (43).

Sincerity is a major theme of the *Seconde Lettre*, "De la flatterie." In this letter, she speaks of the conscience as a compass, and mentions that it is possible to read this compass more or less accurately (31). She states that politeness is, "dans un cœur sensible une expression douce, vraie et volontaire du sentiment de l'estime et de la bienveillance" (31-32), however politeness as practiced in her world was nothing but artifice, which she rejects. It is insincere.

She warns about the real dangers inherent in trying to please everyone (33). Here, we hear an echo of *Émilie's* experiences. D'Épinay does not want her son to accrue empty praise, but rather to understand the value of real merit: "Un honnête homme travaille à mériter la louange, mais ne la recherche point; il sait qu'on n'en est plus digne, quand on n'agit que pour elle" (34). Here she calls upon her son to embrace noble values, including a kind of disinterestedness regarding what others think of him. The danger of flattery, she says, is that it comes close to the truth, but then slips into lies (37-38). For d'Épinay, virtue and truth are habits that must be developed and practiced regularly (40). This idea is reflected in *Montbrillant's examen*. Her son must learn to judge others' characters, she says (41). This is a key lesson in *Montbrillant*, and precisely what Lisieux and Volx teach *Émilie* to do.

In the third letter, d'Épinay discusses the importance of having a moral guide. The truly good guide is sincere (53-54). D'Épinay uses a parable about a blind and a deaf person, each of whom need a guide, to make this point. Thus, the choice of such a "conducteur" is capital (57):

Un homme faible ne se conduit point par lui-même: c'est toujours l'opinion et la volonté des autres qui le déterminent, ou plutôt qui l'entraînent. Il se livre aveuglément à tous ceux qu'il rencontre, et son faible cœur, semblable à la cire molle, prend tour à tour toutes les impressions qu'on lui donne: bonne ou mauvaise, c'est toujours la dernière qui le décide. Tant qu'il est avec des gens sages et estimables, il se conduit comme eux: tout annonce en lui les sentiments d'honneur, de probité et de vertu; mais aussitôt qu'il se trouve parmi les méchants, privé de cette vigueur de l'âme qui fait que l'on conserve les traits de son caractère au milieu de ceux qui s'efforcent de les effacer, il succombe par sa mollesse; son engouement subit et continu pour ses amis du jour le rend complice de tous leurs vices. Semblable à un homme toujours chancelant, il tombe tour à tour dans les bras de ceux qui l'environnent, et ne saurait se tenir sur ses jambes. (68-69)

This passage neatly sums up many of the themes of *Montbrillant*, which chronicles *Émilie's* struggles to figure out whom to trust. For a long time, she is swayed by the bad influence of people like Mlle Darcy and Desbarres, and while Lisieux serves as a good influence, she has to un-learn everything her mis-education has taught her. Finally, she uses Volx as a guide. He is the

right kind of guide, and eventually she comes to the point of not needing a guide at all. In the passage above, the description of a weak person taking on others' vices and erasing their character repeats a lesson Lisieux tried to teach Émilie, namely, that if she did not speak and write in her own words, others' virtues and vices would take the place of her own. The weak person does not trust herself, or the truth, *Lettres* explains (70-71). "C'est donc une vie tranquille et retirée qui convient à un homme faible," d'Épinay writes (71). Here we are reminded of Émilie withdrawing to her chosen society of honest associates at the end of *Montbrillant*. "Il n'y a point de vertu ni de bonheur sans la fermeté," she says (72), another clear echo of one of her novel's major themes, and "La fermeté tient un juste milieu entre l'entêtement et la faiblesse [...]" (72), a maxim for which *Montbrillant* provides the illustration.

The Fourth Letter, on lying, discusses how lying degrades language (75), how "le menteur est encore de tous les hommes le plus lâche, le plus méprisable et le seul dont le retour à la vertu soit presque impossible" (78), and the idea that there is a kind of objective truth that exists outside of each human being (79). There are many convergences with Grimm's positions in this letter.

In the fifth letter, d'Épinay explores what it means to "obéir à sa vocation" (86). She says it means to find your talents and develop them. She tells her son what it means to be "bien né," saying that it means "être touché de la vérité, être sensible à la vertu." This definition is similar to ones she will provide later, in *Conversations*, and reflects Grimm's positions presented to sovereigns in the *CL*. For people in power, d'Épinay says, it is a waste to spend time developing "talens agréables." They should be preparing to lead.

In the sixth letter, on nature, d'Épinay explains that the role of a *père de famille* should be like that of a bird making their nest to care for their young (97-98) and goes on to explain a father's responsibilities in detail. This is a major theme in *Montbrillant* and *Conversations*.

The seventh letter (not published in the *CL*) discusses how to be happy. Forget yourself and serve others (105), d'Épinay preaches, this is the key to true happiness. A man who isolates himself from others cannot be happy. Everyone must remember that only luck keeps him from becoming a beggar (110).

The eighth letter (not published in the *CL*) is an implicit critique of Rousseau. D'Épinay uses this letter to argue that children should begin their moral and ethical education at a very early age. They must also learn, early on, to work hard, be active, and to have a good work ethic. We see many similarities between this letter and the didactic story *La Mauvaise Fille* in *Conversations*. Mlle d'Orville wasted her youth misbehaving and avoiding work, and this made it harder for her to marry. We also see a similar storyline in *Montbrillant*, concerning Émilie's young son who wastes his time at school, with his *précepteur*, and in mastering *talens agréables*. Reaching adolescence with virtually no moral compass, Émilie has to try, quickly, to repair the damage.

The ninth letter comes back to themes of sincerity. If you have the reputation of always being frank, d'Épinay advises, no one will ever accuse you unjustly (121-123); *franchise* has a great value. In this letter, d'Épinay tells the story of a young girl who is dressed up to impress certain people one day, and certain others another day: "On avait, un jour, excessivement paré une jeune personne pour la mener au bal; le lendemain, elle devait rendre visite à une parente dévote [...]" (124). D'Épinay told almost the exact same story in *Montbrillant*. The moral here is the same, too: it is the wrong message to teach children to please everyone. D'Épinay includes

the line, “si l’on se trouve avec deux personnes qui pensent différemment [...]” (124), which also appears verbatim in *Montbrillant*, when Émilie asks Mme de Beaufort how it is possible to please two people with two different views without lying to one or the other of them. Furthermore, d’Épinay says, “La droiture et l’honneur ne souffrent jamais qu’on dise le contraire de sa pensée” and “L’envie de plaire doit avoir ses bornes,” all familiar lessons from *Montbrillant*. D’Épinay stresses that *franchise* and sincerity go along with being truly noble, and that following his conscience was the only way her son would achieve true merit (126-128).

The tenth letter explains that because her son grew up in the lap of luxury, he must learn about the lives of others. He is wrong to see the poor as another sort of being (131). Sharing with the poor must be done sensitively, according them esteem, dignity, and respect. Doing so is a virtue that can – and should – be regularly practiced, a habit that must be developed (131-135). D’Épinay stressed the primacy of agriculture to the State, and cites Mentor from *Télémaque* on this subject (135). She presents an idealized portrait of a society based on agriculture and its particular virtues (135-138). Here she echoes Grimm’s essays in the *CL*. The fact that Grimm and d’Épinay were thinking of *Télémaque* is further evidence that they were attempting to tap into a tradition of presenting *miroirs des princes* to princes.

The eleventh letter (not published in the *CL*) is about Geneva, and specifically the lessons a person can learn from this republic, which is based on merit and where people give things their “juste prix” (140-141). D’Épinay scolds her son for his inapplication and states that she hopes he will learn these values from their stay there, again an echo of *Montbrillant*. It should be noted that the Geneva episode takes place late in *Montbrillant*, evidence that d’Épinay had developed much of her novel by the time she wrote the eleventh letter. She continues with a long discussion of the difference between Geneva, which represents the truth, and Paris, which represents illusion.

Again, nothing is new here. She goes on to stress the importance of *candeur* (145) and tells her son, “[...] mais vous, vous êtes un homme sans naissance, et ne pouvez mériter le suffrage du public que par vos efforts et par vos succès” and “rien n’est moins assuré que votre fortune [...]” (148-149). We have sent this language before, in the last parts of *Montbrillant*.

The twelfth letter (not published in the *CL*) treats how to make man virtuous. One must, d’Épinay explains, appeal to his self-respect (152-153). The virtuous man trusts his own judgment and does not care what other people think, although he is a much harsher judge of himself than they are. In time, the virtuous man becomes his own guide (157). This is exactly what happens to Émilie.

D’Épinay’s contributions to the *CL* were cut out by editor Maurice Tourneux. It is only now that we have access to Ulla Kölving’s freshly-published edition that more people are able to see how *Les Lettres à mon fils* was a part of a larger project. So far, critics have analyzed *Les Lettres à mon fils* without reading them in context in the *CL*. When we do so, we see that while d’Épinay’s voice as a *philosophe* has been suppressed, she was a major contributor to eighteenth-century culture.

## Conclusion: D'Épinay's Legacies

### The Educational Novel

In closing, I would like to explore how our new understanding of *Montbrillant* as *roman pédagogique* can shed light on some of d'Épinay's many legacies. First, our reading of *Montbrillant* expands our notion of the genre of *roman pédagogique*. Robert Granderoute's study of the educational novel from Fénelon to Rousseau does not include many novels by women authors, and of those he includes, when the woman is the Mentor, or guide, figure, she is either Minerva or a "woman of the world" who initiates a young man into the ways of that world, including sex. D'Épinay's novel fits into Granderoute's schema in every conceivable way, including transposition of the student's quest from a mythical landscape to Paris and Marivaux-like realism, *except* that it breaks the patterns Granderoute describes when it comes to women as educators, and d'Épinay's link to Sévigné suggests that the mother-as-educator is a theme that needs to be further examined in considering the literary history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And, as the example of d'Épinay teaches us, there may be some women's works missing from his study because they have been misclassified.

### Companionate Marriage

Second, d'Épinay was ahead of her time in her ideas about using sincerity as the basis of marriage. These ideas are part of larger currents in the west dictating the marriage ideal. "En toute logique, Mme d'Épinay aurait dû connaître une plus grande célébrité au XXe siècle. Sa personnalité et ses goûts étaient plus proches de notre sensibilité récente," writes Badinter (*Ambition*, 473), and one of the ways this is true is her view of marriage.



D'Épinay's work is part of a broader movement in eighteenth-century France moving toward companionate marriage and marital choice. Among the strands that came together to push forward changes in the structure and conception of marriage before the French Revolution, James F. Traer identifies the increased awareness that Enlightenment thinkers had of alternate marital customs in other countries; a growing movement for utility in marriage laws – including in favor of legal divorce, the secularization of marriage, and the toleration of the marriage customs of Protestants and Jews;<sup>1</sup> and the fact that literary men began to argue that partners should be free to choose one another “out of mutual affection and esteem” (49). To Traer's account, we must add literary *women* like d'Épinay who participated in the same lines of thinking. The marriage of “mutual affection and esteem” is elsewhere called a companionate marriage, a term I will use in this discussion. The emphasis on the happiness that a new conception of marriage could bring recalls d'Épinay's words in *Montbrillant*'s second (unused) preface: “Je l'ai trouvé enfin, le bonheur qui jusqu'à présent m'avait fui (*sic*)! Mais il m'a coûté, et quels efforts il m'a fallu faire sur moi-même pour y réussir!” (1:7). Émilie is specifically referring to the happiness she has found with M. Volx when she makes this remark, reminding us of how she tried three different romantic relationships before settling on the right one, the one that would bring her happiness. Unfortunately, because she was living in an unjust State, Émilie could not divorce Montbrillant and marry Volx, and at the novel, she dies, the persecuted victim of patriarchal power.

Traer describes the conventional bonds between husband and wife and parents and children as based on authority and convenience,<sup>2</sup> recalling the portrait of the authoritarian family d'Épinay criticizes. The bonds of affection that were to take their place are exactly what

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<sup>1</sup> Traer, *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France*, 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> See Traer, 70-71.

d'Épinay preferred. Traer argues that authors were responsible for this transition in marriage: “While the modern conception of marriage began as a literary and dramatic creation, moralists and social critics soon sought to translate it into a legal and social reality” (72).

Which other writers were closest to d'Épinay in their ideas on marriage? John Locke, for one. In his *Two Treatises of Government*, he is in favor of equality of the sexes (50-51). Locke and the Enlightenment philosophers believed that progress would come about by changing the law (57). D'Épinay also believed that change would come from perfecting social institutions, especially education. Diderot, author of *Le Père de famille*, represents a departure from all the stories in which the hero turns out to be noble after all (73). Rousseau, whose *Émile* “presents the ideal of a happy, affectionate marriage” (74), although she differs dramatically from Rousseau in how to achieve this ideal, specifically when it comes to what the woman should learn before marriage. D'Épinay also departs from Rousseau in *Julie*. Although the elevated, “spiritual” relationship between Julie and Saint-Preux after Julie refuses to reinstate their passionate relationship in some ways resembles the idealized relationship of Émilie and M. Volx in later drafts when d'Épinay has stripped out the language of passion, *Julie* presents “a celebration of [...] romantic love” that all the same allows the characters to “deriv[e] consolation and a sense of moral superiority” from staying in marriages their parents had chosen for them (73-74). D'Épinay would not approve of this, and although her ideal is for readers to find an idealized relationship within marriage, in *Émilie* she provides a model of someone who finds it in a lover. D'Épinay bears similarities to the Baron d'Holbach, who, in *La morale universelle*, argued that love must be the basis of marriage (74). D'Épinay has some ideas in common with the abbé Pichon, who wanted to do away with the institution of the dowry (75). She would not go this far, because the lack of dowry could put women in danger, but for those who already did not have

one, she showed the necessity of marrying “for [...] personal qualities alone.” The plot of *Montbrillant* has much in common with the plot of the 1769 pamphlet *Le divorce réclamé par Madame la Comtesse de \*\*\**, which showed all the dangers of marriage and argued in favor of legal divorce (77). Finally, the same d’Épinay we have seen who believed that women’s so-called moral and intellectual weaknesses were exclusively a result of social institutions, especially education, which stunted their growth, would have agreed with the Laclos of *De l’éducation des femmes* in the spirit of the law if not the letter. Laclos did not believe that changing women’s education would accomplish anything until other social institutions were changed to ensure equality between men and women and he thought divorce would be one way of accomplishing this. D’Épinay approached the problem through education first and foremost, but had divorce been legal, Émilie’s story would have possibly been very different, and *Montbrillant* may be considered an implicit argument in favor of divorce.

Looking at this collection of writers, with the exception of the Comtesse \*\*\*, we have exclusively men, but d’Épinay’s ideas were very similar to a number of women authors writing in English who promoted an ideal of companionate marriage. In *The Matrimonial Trap*, Laura E. Thomason provides a comprehensive study of the attitudes and strategies of Dorothy Osborne, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hester Chapone, Mary Delany, Sarah Scott, and Eliza Haywood.<sup>3</sup> There are too many similarities between these authors and d’Épinay to name all of them here. Like d’Épinay, they also explored the problems arising from a society in which upper-class women were virtually compelled to marry. In their works, women were often trained to please their families and were expected to marry for the good of their families rather than according to their own inclinations and wishes. When marital choice became somewhat more acceptable,

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<sup>3</sup> See Thomason, *The Matrimonial Trap*.

women could be blamed for the failures of marriages that their inclination led them to pursue. This is precisely what happens to *Émilie*, whose loved ones, when she complains of Montbrillant's abuses in marriage, cite the inclination she had shown for him before their marriage. Like many of d'Épinay's English counterparts' works, *Montbrillant* can be considered an educational manual that teaches women how to select an appropriate mate for a companionate relationship, for which Volx provides the model. D'Épinay suggests that if *Émilie* had received the right type of education, she could have avoided her mistake with Montbrillant. For Thomason's authors, friendship is a more durable basis for a marriage than romantic love (9), which reminds us that d'Épinay toned down the passionate passages in *Émilie's* and Volx's letters to each other (although d'Épinay left them in when *Émilie* writes to her first lover, *Formeuse*). Romantic love is a threat to women's "control and judgment" (Thomason, 9). For Haywood, happiness comes from companionate marriage, and "[s]uch marriages will become widespread only if women are educated and if parents and husbands begin to consider women's interests as equal to their own" (17). Many of Thomason's authors wrote letters, and some actually used their letters about the nature of marriage to cement their companionate relationships with desirable men (13-14). *Montbrillant* models this behavior as well, as *Émilie* cements her relationship with Volx through their exchange of letters. Thomason's authors stress the importance of getting to know a man's character before entering into a relationship with him, a major lesson of d'Épinay's novel, and they prefer "rational friendship" to passionate love; *Émilie's* relationship with Volx approximates rational friendship. Partners in English literary companionate marriages regard each other as equals and speak to one another with frankness. The transparency in *Émilie* and Volx's relationship meets this ideal. Several of Thomason's authors highly prize sincerity and some, including Sarah Scott, write about how women can

become more sincere through getting back in touch with their emotions, from which they have become alienated. Like d'Épinay, many of Thomason's authors recommend study and improved education for women as ways to achieve companionate marriage. For d'Épinay, study is a consolation that can be helpful to women trapped in bad marriages, because it can bring them fulfillment absent from other areas of their lives. For d'Épinay, study is the key to building a better life, both for the mothers who become educators and for their daughters, because instead of simply keeping themselves busy, they are participating in a larger movement to elevate womankind. Eliza Haywood links the health of society as a whole to the nature of marriage, an argument nearly identical to one d'Épinay promotes.

Scholars have been wrong, Thomason argues, to frame the changes in marriage in the eighteenth century as a story of romantic love (160). It is, rather, a story of companionate love, in which d'Épinay fully participates. Writing in 2014, Thomason concludes:

Close readings of these women's writing on the subject of marriage demonstrate the importance of extending this type of analysis. By examining in detail writings by women, we might complete and further clarify an eighteenth-century definition of companionacy and identify the factors that either helped or hindered companionacy's rise. Women, who had the most to gain by these changes in the marriage system, must continue to be the focus of such studies. (162)

My work on d'Épinay is one response to this call. Reading *Montbrillant* as a prescriptive plan for changing education, marriage, and society rather than as a memoir allows us to see the parallels between d'Épinay and these English authors and to broaden our understanding of companionacy in France, for while the male authors have been fairly well covered, there remain lacunae in work on women writers on this topic.

Sincerity Economics

We hear echoes of d'Épinay's idea to use sincerity to reform finance in current works on finance such as Arjun Appadurai's *Banking on Words*. However, Appadurai focuses on the derivative, the idea that we are all beings made up of different packets of data to be measured, rather than integrated beings, and for d'Épinay, it was important to develop an individual subjectivity based on the idea of self-examination and an inner compass.

### Romanticism

D'Épinay's ideas about the artist and sensitive person crushed by society are reflected in works by Romantic writers. We could trace her preoccupation with sincerity to other women writers who came after her, including Mme de Staël.

### D'Épinay the Revolutionary?

D'Épinay's educational ideas in *Montbrillant* may seem both revolutionary and reactionary to a modern audience. For one thing, her plan, aimed at elite women, seems to ignore class. To a certain extent, d'Épinay seems to believe some of the class stereotypes of her age, such as that nobles had certain inborn values. We might perhaps think that d'Épinay simply wants to bring back the glory days of the old nobility. But I argue that we must not leap to this conclusion, because there are several ways in which d'Épinay's ideas were revolutionary.

While it may appear that d'Épinay wants to bring back the old noble values, her ideas about class are more complex than first meets the eye. While she does subscribe to the idea that the old nobility is born with certain values and in *Montbrillant* presents as an ideal that a woman of noble extraction would marry a gentleman with noble values, we must recall that instead of exclusively embracing such a viewpoint, *Montbrillant* caricatures the nobles who would think so,

especially the Marquise de Beaufort. Beaufort, derided by other characters as a “comtesse de Pimbeche” who thinks she is a direct descendent of Saint Louis, is not very understanding when her great-niece Émilie enters into a marriage that is an example of class *mésalliance*. D’Épinay suggests that society’s values – and specifically the idea that money is more important than genealogy – have moved on and de Beaufort has not been able to adapt to the change. The novel seems to criticize de Beaufort for not being more understanding of Émilie’s plight, which represents a situation that would be more and more common as social mobility increased over the course of the eighteenth century. However, the novel does embrace de Beaufort’s idea that Émilie should be raised to have noble values and that this will, along with whatever funds the family can scrape together, allow Émilie to marry a nobleman who will take on her name and her arms. Pauline carries on this quest and does marry a nobleman. However, *Montbrillant* gives no indication of whether he took on her name and her arms. After all, Pauline does not have exactly the same noble pedigree as her mother but has been raised to have noble values, and here again, *Montbrillant*’s message is a bit ambiguous. D’Épinay seems to suggest that both nature and nurture are important and seems to suggest that a tempered version of Madame de Beaufort’s point of view is best.

In *Les Conversations d’Émilie*, d’Épinay emphasizes nurture over nature when it comes to class. In one conversation between Émilie and her mother, La Mère defines being “well born” entirely in terms of moral qualities:

ÉMILIE – Qu’est-ce qu’une fille bien née ?

MÈRE – C’est celle que non seulement ses dispositions naturelles portent au bien ; mais qui au milieu de la pétulance et de l’effervescence du premier âge, donne cependant des symptômes de discernement, conserve un certain maintien qui prévient en sa faveur, et fait garder la mesure en toutes choses avec un tact qui lui promet, pour un âge plus avancé, tous les avantages de la raison et de la sagesse.

ÉMILIE – Eh bien, Maman, suis-je une fille bien née ?

MÈRE – J’espère.

ÉMILIE – J’ai donc du tact ?

MÈRE – C’est à vous me le faire voir.

ÉMILIE – Et comment ?

MÈRE – En me prouvant que vous sentez en toute occasion la convenance des lieux, des temps, des personnes : car ce qui est bien dans un moment est très-déplacé dans un autre ; en montrant de la réserve et de la réflexion jusques dans vos folies. Le tact se manifeste machinalement dans les plus petites choses. Par exemple, si ce monsieur qui a la complaisance de s’occuper de vous, vous regardait comme une marionete, le livre aurait raison, et j’en serais fort affligée, parce qu’il me rappellerait Mademoiselle d’Orville. (103)

This text comes from the 1782 Belin edition, the last published during d’Épinay’s lifetime (43).

But in the 1774 edition, it read simply,

ÉMILIE – Qu’est-ce que c’est qu’une demoiselle bien née ?

MÈRE – C’est à dire qui a des dispositions naturelles à la vertu & un désir très-vif de fuir le mal. (103n2).

Later, Émilie asks the same question again. This time La Mère returns to a definition based on virtue but then admits that the word is also used to describe people born into the nobility:

ÉMILIE – Qu’est-ce que c’est que des gens bien nés ?

MÈRE – Je vous l’ai déjà dit, ce sont ceux qui naissent avec le penchant à la vertu. On se sert aussi de cette expression pour désigner ceux qui ne sont pas nés dans une condition obscure ou basse. (115)

*Conversations* also acknowledges that on a practical level, the nobility is traditionally the military class:

MÈRE – [...] la profession des armes est réservée à la noblesse.

ÉMILIE – Tous les militaires sont donc de la même classe que mon papa. (147-148)

It is clear, however, that La Mère wants Émilie to know that true nobility is based on values, and that being born into the class is a secondary meaning. Though there is the equation of birth and values in the very phrase “bien né,” all the same La Mère tells Émilie that it is up to her to prove she is high born by showing these values in everyday situations. Though she says “le tact se manifeste machinalement dans les plus petites choses,” which may indicate that acting tactfully is inborn and cannot be chosen, on the other hand the mundane situation with the gentleman who



treats Émilie like a marionette instead of a dignified young lady is something very much in the young girl's control. Tact may become natural through sustained practice.

The emphasis on values over birth indicates that nobility can be learned, especially if we consider that in *Les Lettres à mon fils*, *Montbrillant*, *Conversations*, and her correspondence, d'Épinay sought to develop the most effective formula for teaching these values (and indeed, rather than a one-size-fits-all formula, d'Épinay instead produces a series of examples to show readers how to apply her meta-methods in the education of individual children). Though she does not show any examples of peasant children or merchant children learning, we must remember that she follows in the footsteps of predecessors like Madame de Maintenon, who did educate all classes of children, but only so that they would fulfill their destinies in joining the professions or conditions to which their birth into those classes consigned them, and John Locke, who likewise educated children only to prepare them for their pre-ordained estates. In contrast to them, while we may say that d'Épinay clings obstinately to the old social order – the very same, indeed, that Locke and Maintenon were closer to, chronologically speaking – d'Épinay is advocating for a type of social mobility. In *Montbrillant*, Émilie's son and daughter are half-breed nobles. In the course of their exchange of letters, d'Épinay and Galiani discuss heredity as a way of explaining the immoral character of d'Épinay's son: they believe he could not escape the curse of his father's bad (what we would call today) genes. Likewise, in *Montbrillant*, d'Épinay suggests that heredity explains why Émilie's son turns out so bad, but, she suggests, it would not have been insurmountable, and had Émilie been allowed to educate him as she saw fit, this outcome could have been avoided altogether. The novel therefore suggests that both the son and the daughter could have gone either way, turning out noble in character like their mother (a hereditary noble) or weak in character like their father (a product of class *mésalliance*), and education is the only

factor that distinguishes one from the other and seals their fates. Not only, then, does d'Épinay suggest that education trumps the condition one is born into, but she also depicts a character (Pauline) who only has half a pedigree, has a father with an execrable reputation, and, more importantly for her society, has no money and yet is able to marry a gentleman due to the education she receives. Thus, d'Épinay advocates a kind of social mobility and anti-determinism following the model of Sévigné more so than her other predecessors like Locke and Mme de Maintenon.

Does d'Épinay suggest overthrowing the entire class-based social order? No, she does not. How are we to make sense of this? We must consider that d'Épinay's contemporaries did not do so either. D'Épinay's work bears many thematic similarities to her English contemporaries in particular, and so it is to them I turn first. In his *The Eighteenth Century Novel: The Idea of the Gentleman*, Homai Shroff explains that neither Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith, Mackenzie, Sterne, nor Burney, nor others

are able to rise genuinely above class prejudice – not even those who are scathingly severe in ridiculing the snobbery and exposing the degeneration of the upper classes, not even those who emphatically assert that worth can be found in a beggar as well as a lord. Quite often after having demonstrated through a whole novel the fine feelings and generous actions of a low-born hero, they cannot end without discovering gentle blood in the veins of their good churls. (22-23)

We find many examples of the same phenomenon throughout the French literature of the *Ancien régime*, like *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* and a similar phenomenon whereby high-born people only fall in love with each other, and never someone of a different class, in authors from Saint-Réal and Madame de La Fayette through Mme de Tencin. By the 1750s when d'Épinay is writing *Montbrillant*, however, this latter topos has already begun to fall apart (25-26). It is easy for us to paint d'Épinay as a reactionary because she does not seem sufficiently revolutionary to

us. However, historically speaking, she is several revolutions separated from us in time and our view of what it means to be revolutionary is different from what it meant in her era.

Second, we may excuse some of d'Épinay's seeming reactionary-ness if we consider that none of her English contemporaries, including the one whose critiques were the most trenchant, Fielding, advocated for an outright overthrow of the entrenched social order either. Third, and in partial contradiction to the second point, d'Épinay *did* advocate for social change in *Montbrillant*. While Fielding showed the unfairness of the legal system in eighteenth-century England, d'Épinay showed her readers how to navigate within the French legal system to their advantage. While it may at first seem that instead of overthrowing the institution of marriage that did a multivalent kind of violence to women, d'Épinay simply wanted to show individual women how they could carve out a happy niche for themselves within that institution, in fact d'Épinay wanted nothing less than the evolution of marriage over time, which would have profound effects not only on marriage but on the social order writ large.

If d'Épinay's male English colleagues were not revolutionary, what about her English women counterparts, the advocates of companionate marriage whose work we examined in the last section? Thomason explains that they have been labeled "not revolutionary," too (142, 162). It is because they are working within the existing social framework and because they "mak[e] appeals based on reason, morality, and established authorities." But it was often necessary for women who wanted any kind of change to make sure to couch their desires in the terms of conventional morality and to back up their arguments with the statements or endorsements of authorities. It comes from the same force that kept them from publishing, from writing certain kinds of texts, and from using their own names when they did publish. So, then, because of the various ways that women writers had to protect themselves in the eighteenth century, many of

which, like recourse to male authorities, become part of the very fabric of their works, could anything by an eighteenth-century woman before Olympe de Gouges ever be said to be revolutionary? Does Mary Wollstonecraft make the cut? Which women's writing gets to be revolutionary? Read alongside her English counterparts, we can understand d'Épinay's proposals for changing society as an example of women's revolutionary thinking, in that it is presented under the guise of approval from male authorities (the function of M. de Lisieux and M. Volx) and a return to the values of the old nobility.

It is also useful to consider d'Épinay's proposals in light of those of Diderot, one of the writers with whom she worked most closely throughout her life. Diderot's attitude toward revolution can help us better understand d'Épinay's. First, just as d'Épinay aimed to teach readers how to think by having them consider cases as they read the *Montbrillant*, Diderot also wants to teach his readers how to read the *Encyclopédie*. As Wilda Anderson explains, through "demonstration," Diderot teaches his reader "to converse"<sup>4</sup> in the conversation formed by the cross references.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, d'Épinay presents her reader with (a different type of) conversation in *Montbrillant* and, especially, in *Conversations*, with the aim of teaching them to converse. These conversations principally provide models for mothers wishing to serve as educators but also give readers other types of model conversations, such as those on legal matters.

The kind of conversations the *Encyclopédie* teaches its readers to have, explains Anderson, would teach readers how to participate in changes in nature, including changes that "innovate" as well as those that seem "disruptive or violent" and that "caus[e] revolutions" (99;

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<sup>4</sup> Compare this goal to d'Épinay's in *Montbrillant*, where the author presents model conversations between Émilie and her children as a model for mothers wishing to serve as educators (as well as other types of model conversations, such as those on legal matters). Teaching readers to converse is also clearly an aim of *Les Conversations d'Émilie*.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *Diderot's Dream*, 95.

98). The best way to participate in this dynamic change is to be flexible and adapt. Continuity with the past rather than violent disruption is the ideal here, and the philosopher works to preserve the continuities. This description of the Diderotian ideal of change provides a good model for how we might think of the type of change d'Épinay wanted to see as well. The type of change she proposed would be gradual and smooth. It would represent a dramatic shift from the existing marriage system and would take place slowly. For the first girls educated according to her program, the change would be a bit faster and would take place within one generation, as happens for Pauline, but for the movement to spread would take longer. And again, this change would be brought about by readers educated in how to read and think by reading d'Épinay's *Montbrillant*. For Diderot, "the source of real virtue lay in adapting one's place and time to the changes that occur while continuing to promote beneficial changes" (122-123). D'Épinay bases her educational program on virtue and on the idea that through it, more virtue would be exhibited in human behavior in the world. She departs, however, from older conceptions of marriage in which the wife is in no way the equal of the husband. For other thinkers, what she suggests doing to marriage is tantamount to changing "ethical precepts." In this respect, again, we can see that she buys into a similar idea of progress as Diderot.

Anderson argues that Diderot has been mistakenly called "either revolutionary or positivist" (123), but this label does not fit, for two reasons. One, the definition of "revolutionary" was different than our contemporary understandings of the term (123). In the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* of 1762, the approximate year when d'Épinay finished *Montbrillant*, the primary definition of "Révolution" has to do with the revolving of the planets and turning of the seasons. The second definition refers to "*Révolution d' humeurs*, Un mouvement extraordinaire dans les humeurs, qui altère la santé." And the third gives:

Il se dit aussi figurément Du changement qui arrive dans les affaires publiques, dans les choses du monde. *Grande, prompte, subite, soudaine, étrange, merveilleuse, étonnante, heureuse révolution. La perte d' une bataille cause souvent de grandes révolutions dans un État. Le temps fait d' étranges révolutions dans les affaires. Les choses de ce monde sont sujettes à de grandes révolutions.*<sup>6</sup>

The descriptors given here, including “prompte, subite, soudaine,” and so on cannot be applied to d’Épinay’s proposals to change society, because they would necessarily take more time and not be violent. They would, however, be dramatic.

The second reason that Anderson argues Diderot should not be called a revolutionary is because the method of change he advocates is rightly called an evolution, not a revolution (124). We could use the term evolution, as opposed to revolution, to describe d’Épinay’s proposals, too, and call her proposals “subversive,” like Anderson describes the *Encyclopédie*. But I have decided to continue calling her plans a quiet, slow revolution, because of the dramatic and wide-ranging consequences for society. The term revolution carries weight that other terms like evolution do not, and in light of how women’s writing in particular often does not appear subversive because of the strategies women authors had to use, it is important to counterbalance this tendency with a strong term. In last analysis, the most appropriate way I can think of to describe d’Épinay’s plans for society would be as a slow revolution and an alternative to violent revolution.

There is a long history of theorizing about the relationship of the family to the State and the kinds of change that could pass from one to the other that might be called quiet revolutions, and d’Épinay is a part of this tradition. To cite but one classic example, we might think of Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Engels’ theory does not map directly onto d’Épinay’s thought in *Montbrillant*, of course, first, because when she was writing,

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<sup>6</sup> Révolution, *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*.

the form of capitalism with which Engels was familiar was not yet fully in place, although many of its elements were already present. Second, instead of waiting for the overthrow of capitalism to observe the predicted effects upon marriage (the State changing the nature of marriage), d'Épinay's strategy is to do things the other way around, to change marriage to change the State, including its financial institutions like taxation. The changes she prescribed were moral. They tend toward the same vision as Engels': freedom to choose one's spouse; marriage for personal qualities, not money; divorce as a legal and socially acceptable option; equality of men and women within marriage. Women, as Engels explains, do not have control over money and the means of production. Perhaps d'Épinay's reverse strategy (reform of the State brought about by reform of marriage) is a woman's way to cope with this situation and still try to effect change. Not content to wait for the system to collapse, women like d'Épinay, the divorce advocate the Comtesse \*\*\*, Sarah Scott, and Eliza Haywood were working backwards, insisting that they themselves had value as subjects beyond being commodities and using their proclamations and demonstrations of sincerity to prove it (although, interestingly, their sincerity itself became a commodity).

D'Épinay has been called "the first social scientist" (Badinter) because of her deep insights into the mechanisms keeping her society running and especially into their dysfunction. She saw how intricately connected were the class, personal, religious, social, and political realms and how one individual's life could be impacted in innumerable ways by their dynamics. In my view, this is why *Montbrillant* is such a gargantuan novel. It is not, as some critics suggest, because d'Épinay lost control of her book<sup>7</sup>; it is because she showed how bound up all the systems are with each other. She has been compared to Balzac for the financial information she

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Weinreb, *Eagle*, 76.

includes in *Montbrillant*, but d'Épinay should be compared to him as well for her encyclopedic scope and desire to present a totalizing portrait of how society works that is both scientifically accurate and emotionally arresting. Given her detailed analysis of the functioning of society, we must conclude that the parallels she presents between the family and the State are far from accidental.

### Reevaluating A Woman *Philosophe* – A Personal Take on d'Épinay's Legacy

When I encountered the *philosophes* in my French class at fifteen, I was attracted to them because I felt like they were trying to figure out how to live meaningful lives in the face of chance, fate, death, misery, evil, and things generally being out of our control. I devoured *Candide*, appreciating that it presented a catalog of different worldviews that I could compare. But, when I think back to those days, there is something that troubles me. The inevitability of rape is a running joke in *Candide*. Cunégonde is raped in all times and all places by just about everyone, beginning with her initiation into “experimental physics” at the hands of pedophile Pangloss when she is a teenager and “appétissante.” Cunégonde “belongs” to a series of men, from whom there is no escape, except into the next similar situation. Cunégonde is raped so much and forced to work so much that she is completely physically worn out and Candide recoils at the sight of her red, scaly arms when they are finally reunited. One of the drivers of the plot is the anticipation that Candide and Cunégonde will finally get back together and that Candide will finally possess all that was fresh and appetizing on page one. Ultimately, at the end of his lengthy quest, he has to make due with worn-out, used-up Cunégonde, and indeed, this is part of the lesson on “making your garden grow” – that you put up with someone else having enjoyed



the “spoils” you thought were yours – so even in the Candide-Cunégonde relationship, which is supposed to be the “healthy one,” there is the idea of ravishment, entitlement, and owning.

The Old Lady, too, is raped. And half her butt is cut off and eaten, and then at one point she has to ride a horse, and Voltaire has her harp on how hard it is to ride a horse with half a butt, and so on. I remember my teacher explaining how the rapes and the cheek-ectomy were funny. While doing *commentaires de texte*, we learned to identify the places where Voltaire harps on the violence for comic effect. At the horse-riding scene, I remember that we the students did not react until we heard our teacher laugh; Voltaire was doing this on purpose for comic effect. Oh, I remember thinking, this is supposed to be funny. And I saw it. But then I thought, oh, and does that mean the rapes, too? When we got to the end of *Candide*, and everyone was making their garden grow, I had just one question: how did Cunégonde and the Old Lady live with all that rape?

I understood that rape was just one example of the myriad of bad things that could happen to you in *Candide* (and the world) and in spite of which you would have to make your garden grow, and that Voltaire certainly wasn't saying that rape was good. But at the same time, rape was an abstract example, for him, of a bad thing that could happen to you (or, rather, to your previously-relatively-unspoilt girlfriend), and he says you have to go on living in the face of it, like you would have to go on living in the face of all the other misfortunes he describes, but he doesn't say *how* exactly to do it. That part is elided, even as Cunégonde has to make the garden grow while living side-by-side with pedophile Pangloss. And because the actual experience so overflows the abstraction, it renders Voltaire's argument absurd.

I wonder what it would have meant to me, at fifteen, to read *Candide* and to also know that there existed another *philosophe* who was busy philosophizing about *exactly how* to a

meaningful life in a way that actually included how to live with all that rape (and the abuse of women in all its manifestations), to know that there was a *philosophe* who, moreover, presented a vision of the world in which the inevitability of rape was not a running joke, because in her vision, rape was not inevitable, and part of living a meaningful life was working to get rid of it?

Obviously we would not, could not have read d'Épinay's almost-2,000-page book in a high school class. *Candide* is a good representative choice for the eighteenth century for a high school French lit class for second-language learners. But if I could have known that Mme d'Épinay was not just a gown-wearing, poufy-haired socialite who enabled famous men to get together to discuss their ideas, if I could have known that she also wrote a book in the same genre as *Candide* a couple years earlier,<sup>8</sup> a book that also presents different experiments with how to live and compares different worldviews that you can adopt, that she, like the men, also philosophized about how to live a meaningful life? What would it have meant simply to know this parallel tradition existed? And to know that far from being a parallel tradition, that some of d'Épinay's ideas had nourished some very important currents of thought in Western Civ that shape our lives to this day, including what was happening in that very classroom in which I was learning about her? It is an open question.

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<sup>8</sup> Grandroute considers *Candide a roman pédagogique* and includes it in his study.

## Epilogue: A Long Tradition

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, USA, 1968. The protests at the Democratic National Convention were more newsworthy. No clouds of tear gas wafting into presidential hopefuls' showers were involved. It was not televised. The whole world wasn't watching. But it was a revolution in its own right when almost 100,000 Chicagoland parents waged war on their enemies Dick, Jane, and Sally, three small children who were the protagonists of a series published by the Scott, Foresman Company, used to teach reading in many American public and parochial schools from the 1930s to the 1970s. Dick and Jane taught – or were meant to teach – children using the “sight-reading” approach. Instead of learning to read through phonics, a phonetics-based approach that taught the sounds associated with different combinations of letters so that they could “sound out” new words, with the “sight-reading” (also called the “look-say” or “whole word”) approach, children were supposed to learn to read through recognizing whole words on sight. Dick and Jane relied on simple, repetitive language so that children would come to memorize the look of key words.

It was after Sputnik and before Neil Armstrong, and Americans were concerned that they were falling behind other nations, and that their educational system was to blame. Many of them felt that Dick, Jane, and Sally were as much a menace to America's future as Soviet missiles. Many American parents who were not professional educators could tell that something was wrong with Dick and Jane because their children were not learning to read. These parents, many of them mothers, did not stay silent. They observed what was going on in their homes and they wrote to the *Chicago Tribune*, a newspaper with a readership in the hundreds of thousands in

America's "second city" and its suburbs, and even more through syndication.<sup>1</sup> Mothers harnessed the power of their personal experiences to illustrate the failures of Dick and Jane. Mrs. William Ries, for example, wrote that she was a "long way from being" a professional teacher – and yet she stepped in to fill this role out of necessity and she felt comfortable condemning one method of teaching reading and endorsing another. Ries connected the experiences of her own three children to wider social issues like the drop-out rate and asserted, "[w]ere I a ghetto mother, with education a necessity for my children to break out, I would march first for phonetic reading in my school." To my knowledge, no one ever actually marched for phonics. But these mothers had other strategies of protest: teaching their children themselves at home, attempting dialogue with their children's teachers, and writing to the newspaper, where they found a sympathetic ear in Joan Beck.

Hailed as a "pioneering journalist," Beck was one of a handful of women writing for the *Chicago Tribune* when she was hired in 1950.<sup>2</sup> She went on to become the first woman to sit on the paper's editorial board. When she first started writing, the women's beat covered matters like "fashion, cooking, and beauty tips,"<sup>3</sup> but already early on in her career, her byline began to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Mrs. William Ries in "Forget Dick and Jane! Let's Use Phonics (Joan Beck's Mail)." *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 10, 1968, final ed., sec. 5: 4; Mrs. Frank Crisafulli in "Readers React to Dick and Jane (Joan Beck's Mail)" *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 24, 1968, final ed., sec. 5: 6.

<sup>2</sup> Breslin, Meg McSherry. "Joan Beck, 75, Pioneering Journalist." *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1998. (Edition and page numbers not given.)

<sup>3</sup> Breslin, *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1998. See, for example, Beck, Joan. "Advice on Sororities for the College Freshman." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1952, final ed., FR Part 2 – Page 9, F Part 3 – Page 9. ---. "N.U. Sororities Pledge 478 Mid Tears and Joy." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 29, 1952, final ed., F\* Part 1 – Page 21. ---. "Fashions in Wedding Rings: How to Choose." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Feb. 20, 1952, final ed., \*F Part 3 – Page 1. ---. "Job as Teen Model: Nice If You Can Get It." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mar. 31, 1952, F Part 3 – Page 1 FR Part 2 – Page 5. ---. "Attractive Furs are Offered in Every Price Range." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug. 4, 1952, final ed., H\* Part 3 – Page 4.

follow headlines about medicine, safety, and social issues.<sup>4</sup> Although she did not start out as an expert in medical research or education, she became one through her efforts to educate herself so that she could educate her public. Beck was particularly interested in child development and education. In her syndicated columns and books, Beck combined the latest scientific insights into brain and other medical research with practical advice parents could use to improve their children's outcomes in education and other areas of life.<sup>5</sup> In order to do so, Beck kept up with four pediatric journals and four educational journals each month, read at least one or two new books every week, and attended medical conventions like those of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association.<sup>6</sup> Her columns were immensely popular, "averaging more than 1,000 letters per week."<sup>7</sup> Clearly, she reached many people and the issues she tackled – and her treatment of them – spoke to them.

Reading was an especial interest of Beck's. She investigated new teaching methods and published easy-to-follow steps parents could follow to work at home with their children who were experiencing difficulties learning in school and who had been labeled as "retarded" (a term then in widespread use).<sup>8</sup> She also published guides targeting all or most children. Based on her

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<sup>4</sup> Beck, Joan. "Medical Science and Speed Save Premature Babies' Lives in City." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1951, final ed., H\* Part 3 – Page 1. ---. "Hospital Births are Safer." *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, July 31, 1955, 29. ---. "Practice Makes Parking as Simple as A B C's." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 8, 1952, Du Page regional ed., F\* Part 5 – Page 1. ---. "How Mothers Combine Careers and Home." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, final ed., F Part 2 – Page 7. (The subheading on the section "Today With Women" reads "Movies – Amusements," which is definitely not what this, the first, article is about!) "Teens Tell Views on School Segregation." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, final ed., HR\* Part 2 – Page 1 H\* Part 4 – Page 3.

<sup>5</sup> Breslin, *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Hedlund, Marilou. "Joan Beck Tries to Give a Mother New Information – Not Advice." *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 28, 1965, final ed., E1.

<sup>7</sup> Breslin, *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Beck, Joan. "Unlocking Secrets of the Brain, Part 2: Why Jimmy Can Read," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 27, 1964, K 25. Beck, Joan. "By Request: A Repeat on Minimal Brain Dysfunction," *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1966, I3.

research, Beck felt very strongly that waiting until first grade (approximately age six), as was common in school systems, was too long to wait to start teaching a child to read. She urged parents to teach their preschoolers to read, at home, during the period when their developing brains were most receptive to learning language, and based on her research, she chose phonics as the best method (for hearing children).<sup>9</sup> Her daughter's experiences transferring schools halfway through first grade also informed her choice.<sup>10</sup>

In 1964, Beck published a serialized guide in the *Tribune*, called "Short Cuts to Reading You Can Teach Your Child."<sup>11</sup> Each "short cut," or lesson, was presented in the form of a short comic strip that was meant to be cut out of the paper and put in a scrapbook, together with each additional comic that would be published in the coming days and weeks, for easy reference and review. These comic strips were called "games." The first strip shows a mother telling her son she wants him to focus on the sounds, showing the parent and child exactly how this "game" would work, how they would work together. Parents are instructed to present the lessons in small chunks well suited to a young child's short attention span, only when the child is in the mood to focus on them, and to repeat them several times a day. Reminders to review earlier lessons are built into the strips. More challenging phonetic rules – those involving combinations of letters – would be presented later in the series. Beck stresses that parents should not discourage their children, nor "disparage [them] when [they] forge[t]," nor make them "wallow" and "guess" when they do not know the answer. They must be praised for their success: "[p]raise your child

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<sup>9</sup> Beck, Joan. "Four Compelling Reasons Why You Should: You Can Teach Your Pre-School Child to Read." *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1964, I 22.

<sup>10</sup> Beck, Joan. "Readers React to Dick and Jane (Joan Beck's Mail)," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 24, 1968, E 6.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Beck, Joan. "Here are First 7 Lessons in Reading Series for Preschoolers: New Word Game Shows Parents How To Teach." *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1964, SW 6. Readers were primed by this essay two weeks prior: Beck, Joan. "Four Compelling Reasons...." *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1964, I 22.

for each sound he learns and each word he sounds out”; “[a] child learns faster when praised”; “[m]ost important, always praise and encourage your child. Share his excitement at his own cleverness and the new world that is opening to him.” Beck included advice for working through the comics with preschoolers and with older children who had not yet learned to read in school using the “look-say” (Dick and Jane) method, with special advice on choosing the right pace appropriate to each group and handling the emotional baggage that had understandably accrued to the latter group.

After the first seven lessons, published in a block on the same page, the eighth was in the same issue but in the comics section, and the ninth lesson was published in the next day’s paper. Subsequent lessons were published over “12 more weeks, daily and Sunday.” This rhythm was effective because it did not overwhelm parents and children with the whole program at once, but the different strips were published frequently enough that a child would not forget prior lessons and that the child’s learning momentum would not be broken – nor the parent’s motivation for teaching.

The program was so popular in fact that in 1968, Beck wrote that she had received “literally thousands of letters from parents indicating that they have taught, or plan to teach, their own children a phonetic approach to reading because their school has failed to do so.”<sup>12</sup> By that point, a little over four years had passed since the original publication of “Short Cuts,” but already, Beck says, “[a]lmost 100,000 parents have requested partial or complete reprints [...]”<sup>13</sup> The program was also published in workbook form five times between 1965 and 1989.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Reply to Mrs. Frank Crisafulli.

<sup>13</sup> “Readers React to Dick and Jane (Joan Beck’s Mail),” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 24, 1968, F 6. ProQuest.

<sup>14</sup> Web. Worldcat. <http://www.worldcat.org/title/short-cuts-to-reading-you-can-teach-your-child/oclc/2684810/editions?referer=di&editionsView=true>. See, for example, Beck, Joan and

Today the evidence seems to suggest that while multiple modalities should be used to teach reading – it would, after all, be ludicrous to completely ignore students’ global comprehension of stories and other texts – a stronger foundation in phonics offered to teachers as part of their training and a much more comprehensive and systematic phonics program taught to students in school would benefit fledgling readers today and the adults they become – and our society as a whole – tomorrow.<sup>15</sup> In short, back in the 1960s, Beck was right and so, too, was the army of outraged parents, largely mothers, speaking out against Dick and Jane and teaching their children phonics at home, under Beck’s leadership.

If we boil down Beck and her readers’ involvement in the phonics movement to its simplest components, we find several elements that are so familiar to us that we might well take them for granted, at least in countries where it is acceptable to educate women. To us it seems natural that parents would observe their children and judge the effectiveness of professional educators’ methods based on the results they see. It seems obvious to us that parents would know their children best, and there seems to be an ingrained cultural idea that this is especially the case for mothers. We would not give a second thought to the notion that parents without any pedagogical training whatsoever should be able to develop the best method of educating their children based on their observations and trial and error, using whatever materials they have at hand, like Beck’s strips that required only the newspaper and other common everyday objects. We see stories in various media about children with autism, for example, once thought to be

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Dorothy Taft Watson. *Shortcuts to Reading You Can Teach Your Child*. Mundelein, IL: Career Pub., 1989.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, “Teaching Children to Read,” National Reading Panel, 2000.

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/pages/findings.aspx> See also: Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print and Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*; Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read – And What You Can Do About It*; Flesch, *Why Johnny Still Can’t Read – A New Look at the Scandal of Our Schools*.



unreachable, whose parents left their jobs and stayed home to develop alternative curricula not offered by the schools – methods that worked.<sup>16</sup> Many others have simply supplemented a school curriculum that failed to address their children’s needs or to engage their interest. We have no problem accepting that mothers could develop an alternate, superior educational method better suited to meet their children’s needs.

Likewise, in the realm of journalism, we do not bat an eyelash at the prospect of mothers writing in to the newspaper to speak openly about their real experiences with their children, with the explicit aim of sharing this information with other mothers. We have no problem with mothers inscribing their discoveries into systematic, easy-to-follow guides that other mothers could use and using journalistic and literary means to broadcast their educational programs, incrementally, to other mothers. It seems natural that mothers would want to try to use education reform to change their society for the better. Beck’s informants imagine solving social problems like unemployment through better reading instruction. They even question the available services provided by the State and demand better. Considering Beck’s career, we can easily accept that a woman could make herself an expert on educational concerns.

Many women were involved in the phonics crusade – besides Beck, we can name reading experts Dorothy Taft Watson and Dr. Marilyn J. Adams, artist Becky (Krehbiel) who drew the “Short Cuts” comic strips,<sup>17</sup> the mothers who taught phonics at home, and many others.<sup>18</sup> They had female predecessors, too. Among them is Rebecca Smith Pollard (1831-1917), an American educator who, in the late nineteenth century, created a sequential program to teach children to

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Strickland, “Portrait of a 6-year-old artist with autism and her therapy cat.”

<sup>17</sup> “Rebecca Falconer Krehbiel” (obituary), April 22, 2000. *Chicago Tribune*.

<sup>18</sup> Another example is Julie Hay, a schoolteacher whose name is part of the Hay-Wingo method, another phonics method, which she developed in her Chicago-area classroom. See Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (1955), 105-106.

read using intensive phonics and published as a collection of school books – spellers, readers, and teacher’s manuals published for the first time in 1889 – called *Synthetic Methods*.<sup>19</sup> Like Beck’s strips, which begin with a mother working with her son, *Synthetic Methods* stages a mother teaching her son, Johnny, and his toddler sister, Bess, to read, using phonics. “Short Cuts” and *Synthetic Methods* have many other common elements, which are updated and simplified in the 1960s version. In fact, Pollard’s system was the mother of all subsequent American phonics systems. In the 1890s, her books were used “in every state in the Union.”<sup>20</sup> “Few women have single-handedly contributed so much to the field of reading,” writes Kristen Mayhew.

Another of Beck’s precursors is Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the groundbreaking medical doctor and pedagogue who created the method of education that bears her name. Beck frequently refers to Montessori’s materials in her columns, and mentions that she has seen very young children learn to read using them.<sup>21</sup> Like Beck, Montessori combined the latest scientific and medical research with pedagogy. Like Beck, Montessori was deeply interested in how best to teach children with learning disabilities, and felt that the methods that worked best for these children would, in many cases, work well for other children. Like the cases Beck describes, Montessori often worked with children whom society and the educational establishment felt were “uneducable,” with phenomenal results. Like Beck, Montessori found that children could learn to read much earlier than age six.

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<sup>19</sup> See Pollard, *A Complete Manual. Pollard’s Synthetic Method of Reading and Spelling. Designed to Accompany Synthetic Readers and Spellers*.

<sup>20</sup> Mayhew, Kristen, 2011, [https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/literary-cultural-heritage-map-pa/bios/Pollard\\_Rebecca\\_Smith](https://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/literary-cultural-heritage-map-pa/bios/Pollard_Rebecca_Smith).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Beck, Joan. “Teaching Preschooler to Read is Happy Job,” *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1966, B2. ---. “By Request: A Repeat on Minimal Brain Dysfunction,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1966, I3. ---. “Why our Johnnies still can’t read,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1981, 23.

If these elements of Beck and her readers' involvement in the phonics movement seem familiar or acceptable to us today, there was a time when it was unclear that parents, and least of all mothers, were well suited to educate their own children. Such was the case for d'Épinay. During the nineteenth century, however, educating her children was thought to be part of a good mother's duties on a much wider scale in North America and Western Europe than it had been. The rise of the mother-as-educator ideal is complex and is intertwined with the rise of various nationalisms.<sup>22</sup> Education in schools also became feminized. Teaching was one of the only professional jobs besides nursing allowed women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and long after, women are still socialized to enter these professions in disproportionate numbers compared to their male counterparts. In the field of education, though men still outnumber women in the highest ranks of university professors and in school administration, women outnumber men in grammar school teaching. So ubiquitous is the female elementary school teacher that the elementary school seems almost the province of women.<sup>23</sup> It is no coincidence that education, especially early education, is an undervalued and underpaid profession.

These changes alone may account for the large number of women, especially mothers, involved in the pro-phonics crusade in the twentieth-century United States, but that is not the only explanation.

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<sup>22</sup> Interested readers may find more comprehensive accounts in, for example, Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914*. Greenfield and Barash, eds. *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature, 1650-1865*. Cherniavsky, *That Pale Mother Rising: Sentimental Discourses and the Imitation of Motherhood in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America*. Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: an American History*. Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760*. Smith, *We have Raised All of You: Motherhood in the South, 1750-1835*. Arnup, Lévesque, and Roach Pierson, eds. *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, this complaint from a white male English teacher, author, and edu-blogger who objects to the gynocracy school has become: Rademacher, "Can We Talk About How Many White Women There Are in Schools?"

When we consider the ideological bases and assumptions that are part of Beck's movement, we can see the influence of educational thinkers like Locke, Rousseau, and John Dewey. Locke and Rousseau famously believed that each child should receive an individualized plan of education tailored to meet his temperament and needs. Rousseau's *Émile, ou De l'éducation*, published in 1762, popularized these ideas, made many disciples in France and beyond, and irrevocably impacted education in the west.<sup>24</sup> (And in other parts of the world: in the 1870s, for example, the ideas of Rousseau and his acolytes Johann Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel were imported from the United States and Britain and became influential in Japan.<sup>25</sup>) At the end of the book that bears his name, Rousseau's character Émile, all grown up, announces that he will teach his own son. This is one of the most important threads in the phonics story: parents are empowered to observe which methods work best for their children and to choose the most effective.

Dewey (1859-1952) was an influential American educational reformer and philosopher who could in many (though not all) respects be considered a proto-feminist, who thought social change was possible as a result of educational change, and who believed that everyone, not just experts, should participate in journalism and use it as part of the political process to shape their community.<sup>26</sup> In the American phonics story, of course, we find parents wanting to use education to bring about societal transformation, parents writing to the newspaper to share insights and demand better services from the state.

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<sup>24</sup> See Bloch, *Rousseauism and Education in Eighteenth-Century France*.

<sup>25</sup> Lincicome, "Local Citizens or Loyal Subjects?"

<sup>26</sup> On Dewey's views on women, including discussion of the contradictions, see, for example, Upin, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Instrumentalism beyond Dewey." On Dewey's views on journalism, see Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*.

It may seem like the history of education in the west is made up of unsung women practitioners who quietly taught their own and other people's children, while the recognized innovators were Locke, Rousseau, Dewey, and other well-known male philosophers. Pioneers like Beck and her predecessors like Montessori stand out as exceptional women – exceptions, in other words – who crossed the line from being “simply” mothers or teachers to being renowned educational thinkers, like the men. But women philosophers of education were more than the outliers in or inheritors of a field whose contours had been shaped by men's philosophizing. I argue that just as we can trace the links back from Beck (1964) to Pollard (1889), we can go even farther back to find that women's thoughts on education were part of the very matrix from which western education as we know it today grew. Women played a larger and more active role in the educational controversies and proliferation of educational theories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that have in large measure defined western education ever since. There is a hidden network, a secret history of women's contributions that undergirds part of the infrastructure of the arguments of Rousseau, Dewey, and others. This also means that those women pedagogues who seem exceptional are actually part of a long line of other women pedagogues, whether they know it or not. Take Maria Montessori,<sup>27</sup> for example, whose oft-cited influences include doctor Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (1774-1838), who, among other things, educated deaf-mute students (and also performed medical experiments on them), made contributions to what is called special education, and worked to educate the so-called wild child, Victor of Aveyron; another doctor, Édouard Séguin (1812-1880), a student of Itard's who devoted his career to the education of children with intellectual disabilities; the creator of

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<sup>27</sup> On Montessori's influences, see, for example, Kramer, *Maria Montessori*, 59-67. For early Montessori works in which one can trace some of the influences that were important to her, see, among others: Montessori, *The Montessori Method*. ---. *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*. ---. *The Secret of Childhood*, 17-23.

kindergarten, Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852), who believed that each child had unique needs that education should strive to meet and who developed educational toys; and Fröbel's teacher, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), an influential Swiss educational reformer. Though the names on this list are exclusively male, Montessori actually has female precursors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries she herself probably did not realize helped create the tradition of which she was a part.

Parts of this network of women thinkers have been exposed. For example, in *Conduct Books for Girls in Enlightenment France*, Nadine Bérenguer briefly mentions, among others, the intertextual links between Madeleine de Puisieux (1720-1798) and Madame de Lambert (1647-1733), both writers of educational texts for women.<sup>28</sup> The full extent of these connections, however, remains unexplored. We know far too little about how women looked to other women for reflections on women's education and far too little about how men looked to women for reflections on everyone's education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In her groundbreaking article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Joan Scott argued that if gender was no longer simply relegated to studies of the family, it could shed new light on what had been traditionally considered men's domains in history – politics, economics, war, and so on.<sup>29</sup> Although education might already seem to be the domain of women, we lack a full understanding of women's contributions, especially their early contributions. And perhaps if we knew more about the true extent their contributions, it would help combat the idea that, apart from a few standout minds, education is a profession that women inherited. Innovators like Montessori were indeed exceptional by the force of their ideas, but in

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<sup>28</sup> Bérenguer, *Conduct Books*, 8, 15, 27, 54 (27 for this example). See also Caron, *Écriture et vie de société*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."

their number they are far from exceptional: they are connected to other women who were educational theorists and practitioners.

One of the most important educational thinkers of the eighteenth century – and predecessor to Montessori, Beck, and company – was Louise d'Épinay. Not only can we identify many parallels between Beck's movement and d'Épinay's – both criticized the practices of the educational establishment, both consulted the great educational minds of their eras and weighed the experts' opinions against their children's lived experiences, both believed mothers could become experts in the education of their own children, both developed model educational programs for mothers to use in educating their own children, both stressed the use of praise rather than scolding, both used forms of journalism to distribute their programs sequentially to their readers, both believed they could effect positive social change through their programs – but we can also establish that d'Épinay's work is one of the tributaries that feeds the currents of thought that shaped Beck's movement and western education more generally. Through d'Épinay, we can also connect modern women pedagogues to the great seventeenth-century letter writer Madame de Sévigné. D'Épinay fills in a substantial missing piece in the history of women's educational innovation and influence.

### Fewer than Six Degrees of Separation

To see the hidden reach of d'Épinay's ideas, let's do a thought experiment.

We can easily draw analogies between Sévigné and d'Épinay and Pollard and Beck, for instance, and between d'Épinay and her intended readers and Beck and her readers. In all cases, we have a tradition of women looking to other women for reflections on women's (and

everyone's) education. What's more, Beck, et al. are the latter day inheritors of Sévigné and d'Épinay.<sup>30</sup>

If we consider the links we can make between d'Épinay and the phonics movement, it is clear that we can connect her thought to both sides of the great debate. The whole-language method of teaching reading competed with phonics in the 1980s and 1990s. Whole-language placed a heavier emphasis on global reading comprehension. It was not so important to be able to read every word, and students were often encouraged to guess based on the context, although some phonics were used, as the teacher saw fit to use them. Some conservative commentators see the whole-language method of teaching as a kind of left-wing conspiracy to teach moral relativism and the idea that words can mean different things in different contexts – post-structuralism for first graders.<sup>31</sup> And there is, of course, the suspicion that we make a leap from the idea that meaning is unfixed and unstable to ideas including that each individual is to be

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<sup>30</sup> In *Thinking Through the Mothers: Reimagining Women's Biographies*, Janet Beizer warns that feminist authors and scholars seeking to recover the missing stories of women authors of yore often end up using metaphors of genealogy and lineage that are patriarchal, that are the master's tools, and that reproduce the culturally-constructed importance of blood ties that have never benefitted women. For women writers whose foremothers are often unknown and unknowable, placing value on genealogy always reminds us of that lack of ancestors. Beizer argues, with Deleuze and Guattari, that we would be better served by the image of the rhizome, which expands horizontally and which "connects any point to any other point." (See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Massumi. 21. Cited in Beizer, 242.) For Beizer, the rhizome is about elective affinity, chosen alliances (Beizer, 243). I would like to suggest that not only can we trace a historical lineage of women writers who were pedagogues, but also that we can choose to highlight the points of convergence between them for practical purposes. Each time a new movement begins, its members would not need to think they are isolated and going into uncharted territory, but could look to other similar models from the past for inspiration. Many points can be connected in novel ways, rhizome-style, by examining this history.

<sup>31</sup> For an example of the position I am describing, see Blumenfeld, Sam. "Readingate: The 100-Year Coverup of Educational Malpractice," Parts 1-4. For a more complete history of the reading wars, see Kim, "Research and the Reading Wars." For more on the political issues involved in the reading wars, especially the liberal-conservative divide, and a fuller description of the recent issues involving phonics and whole language teaching, see Lemann, "The Reading Wars." It is worth noting that conservative icon Phyllis Schafly taught her children phonics at home and is a phonics advocate. See Schafly, "Schools Don't Teach Kids to Read."



treated differently depending on their identity category – including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, and so forth – rather than that everyone should be treated “equally,” which, to many conservatives, means ignoring these identity descriptors and focusing on merit while assuming that every individual has an equal opportunity to succeed, for example. Pitted against whole-language, phonics teaches children a different ideological lesson: that texts contain a meaning that is meant to be decoded and that being able to read all the words, rather than guessing based on context, will allow a person to glean the truth of what the text is saying.

To hear them tell it, one of the people most to blame for this liberal conspiracy is Horace Mann (1796-1859),<sup>32</sup> an American politician and staunch advocate of universal, free, public education. They claim that he was not in favor of phonics, and he is one of the people we have to thank for Dick and Jane. He observed that the sight-word method worked for deaf children and believed it would work better for hearing children than phonics. Now, in *Why Johnny Can't Read*, Rudolf Flesch actually says something completely at odds with this picture of Mann. Flesch explains that “progressive education hasn't always been wedded to the word method by any means” and names Mann alongside “other patron saints of progressive education, like Pestalozzi and Froebel” and Montessori, who all believed in using phonics. Flesch says that Mann “observed the teaching of phonics in Prussia and recommended it enthusiastically for use in American schools” (128). Regardless of what Mann actually believed and advocated, conservatives writing more recently have vilified him. To them, his opposition to phonics seems to be part of his communitarian aims and his particular vision for what an American democratic society would look like. Instead of teaching Americans to read the truth so that they could decide things for themselves and live in freedom, citizens would be open to the idea that words could

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<sup>32</sup> For an example, see Cothran, “This History of Phonics.” The *Atlantic* article and James Kim book cited above also mention Horace Mann as a touchstone.

mean different things at different times, and as a result, they would be more open to accepting tyranny on the part of their government. An easily manipulated electorate, they would remain pliable, suggestible all throughout their lives. On top of this, one source of Mann's ideals for public school was – horror of horrors! – the Prussian educational system,<sup>33</sup> which did, to a greater or lesser extent, actually work to keep citizens in a state of unquestioning, unthinking acceptance, was exceptionally good at producing obedient, efficacious soldiers, and has been implicated, along with other historical factors, in the rise of various nationalisms, and, in the German context specifically, Nazism.

Although the Prussian educational system became indefensibly perverted as it changed with the times, German primary and secondary school today is still based on its structure, and it was endorsed by enlightened monarch Frederick the Great of Prussia (Friedrich II, 1712-1786) by a decree in 1763, the *Generallandschulreglement*. The ideas behind the system came from Johann Julius Hecker (1708-1768), educational reformer and creator of the first *Realschule*. Hecker's innovations included incorporating gardening and other practical tasks into schooling and establishing vocational schools for students not pursuing a classical education. (These divisions of students into various categories have been blamed for keeping the class structure firmly entrenched in Germany.) Space does not allow a complete catalogue of all the likely educational influences on Hecker and Friedrich II, but one possible source of ideas was the literary newsletter the *Correspondance littéraire*. Friedrich was not a subscriber to the *CL*, although Grimm tried for three years in the 1760s to recruit him. Although the Prussian king did not subscribe, and because of the secrecy that was by necessity endemic to the correspondence, it

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<sup>33</sup> Flesch claims the Prussian system used phonics. Flesch, who hailed from Austria, often mentions that Austrian and German children never have the same difficulties with reading or spelling as their English-speaking counterparts, especially those in America, because of the use of phonics in the German-speaking world.

is somewhat difficult to know who exactly did subscribe and when, we do know that his brother Henry (Heinrich) did, along with two of his nephews, and a number of other sovereigns of German and other European states.<sup>34</sup> In her study of d'Épinay's contributions to the *CL*, Mélinda Caron lists Friedrich as one of the sovereigns who gained access to Enlightenment philosophical ideas and Parisian social life through its pages (31). As Grimm and d'Épinay's educational ideas circulated among this elite readership, it is likely that Friedrich was acquainted with them and that they form one of the threads running through the Prussian educational system, especially as Grimm and d'Épinay's conception of education as working to improve or perfect one's inner self converges with the Pietist movement, which placed an emphasis on developing *Innerlichkeit*, or "inner spirituality," "depth," "inwardness," or "introspection." The Prussian kings supported Pietism in order to weaken the dominant Lutheran church. American reformers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries admired the Prussian educational system and imported some of its precepts, and that returns us to the ever-ongoing phonics debate. Through a chain that connects d'Épinay and Grimm to Frederick the Great and Hecker to Horace Mann, John Dewey, and other American reformers interested in the Prussian school system, we can say that d'Épinay was a purveyor of part of the ideology behind anti-phonics, and we get from d'Épinay to the phonics movement in three steps.

Moreover, Flesch, author of *Why Johnny Can't Read*, lays the blame for the move away from phonics directly at Rousseau's feet – or rather, Flesch blames a misapplication of *Émile*. The whole-word (look-say) method is used, Flesch contends in 1955, precisely because it does not teach children to read. Rousseau famously said that *Émile* would probably learn to read by

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<sup>34</sup> Roy-Marracci, "La Correspondance littéraire de Grimm et Meister de 1776 à 1789 : Écrire et lire un périodique des princes éclairés d'une révolution à l'autre."

the age of 10, simply because he would not care if he did not learn until age 15.<sup>35</sup> The motivation must be there, that is all. When *Émile* received notes from people inviting him out to drink cream with them, he would be motivated to learn to read, and then he would learn. (The details of exactly how, Rousseau leaves out.) This passage in *Émile* spawned an obsession with “reading readiness,” argues Flesch, which has erroneously translated Rousseau’s ideas into making children wait until they are simply more mature, more in control of their behavior and attention, more tractable, and therefore seemingly more “ready” for any academic work. In American mid-century schools, the motivation to learn to read comes not from pupils’ excitement to learn something useful (as was the case for *Émile*) but rather from something negative: the shame of not having learned to read for at least two years spent wasting time with Dick and Jane. Rousseau, Flesch says, intended no such thing.<sup>36</sup> D’Épinay’s ideas were likely one source of inspiration for Rousseau, and one of the themes that emerges in her method is the age-appropriateness of reading and other educational material. Yet again, we get from d’Épinay to anti-phonics in a jiffy: this time, just two easy steps – Rousseau and American reformers.

On the other side of the phonics debate, however, we also find d’Épinay’s contributions undergirding the phonics movement. Through phonics proponent Joan Beck, for example, we can also trace a line back to d’Épinay. Beck often cited Maria Montessori’s methods and materials in her articles. Montessori was a very influential pedagogue, and there are many Montessori schools of either the International Montessori or American Montessori variety in the United States and around the world today, and the methods of teaching reading she developed rely on phonics. Flesch described her teaching four-year-olds how to read by teaching them the

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<sup>35</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile, ou de l’éducation*. In *Œuvres complètes*, t. 4. Paris: Gallimard, 1969; 357-359. Web. ARTFL. Accessed 12 November 2017.

<sup>36</sup> See Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, 69-78, especially 70-71, 74.

shapes and sounds of letters.<sup>37</sup> We know that Montessori was inspired in her general principles, though not necessarily in the particulars of teaching reading, by the work of Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827),<sup>38</sup> among others. Although Rousseau's *Émile* had been condemned in Switzerland, Pestalozzi's professor, Bodmer, was a devotee of Rousseau and founding member of the Helvetic Society, whose aims included reforming society to conform to Rousseau's ideas. Pestalozzi, too, was a member and wrote for the society's journal, until it was suppressed.

We can see Rousseau's influence in Pestalozzi's motto, "[l]earning by head, hand, and heart," which reflects the value he placed on experiential learning and the development of moral and emotional intelligences alongside rote learning. We can also see Rousseau's influence in the educational institutions Pestalozzi founded and trace it throughout a number of Pestalozzi's works. And because the evidence suggests that d'Épinay and Rousseau exchanged ideas on education, we can thus draw a line back from Beck to Montessori to Pestalozzi to Rousseau to d'Épinay, and from d'Épinay we can even continue the line back to Sévigné.

Montessori's method, partly inspired by Pestalozzi's and Rousseau's, is known for allowing children to exhibit readiness and interest before teaching them new skills – permitting them to learn at their own pace, thereby meeting the different educational needs of different children, giving children a choice of which activities they would like to do (within reason) and control over how they structure their time, and fostering self-sufficiency and confidence. D'Épinay's method, like Sévigné's, had its own version of many of these elements. Likewise, we saw that Beck emphasized praise and the idea that learning must not become associated in the

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<sup>37</sup> Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> For more information on Pestalozzi's views, see Pestalozzi, Tröhler, and Soëtard, *Écrits sur la méthode*, vol. 1-2. See also: James, *Aux sources de la pédagogie moderne*. Soëtard, *Pestalozzi, un pédagogue suisse*.

child's mind with unpleasant things. While Locke and Rousseau are better known for preaching this philosophy of teaching, d'Épinay and Sévigné show that there is a whole, parallel women's tradition of teaching based on positive reinforcement. While the Locke/Rousseau/*Émile*/Pestalozzi connection is well known, the d'Épinay/Sévigné contribution remains in shadow, but it is nonetheless there. Thus, like Rousseau's, d'Épinay's work fed strains of both the phonics and the anti-phonics movement in the twentieth-century United States. D'Épinay could be a point in the education rhizome to which all other points connect.

In Beck's journalism, we saw the idea that mothers could write about their experiences in order to share them with each other to get new ideas about educating their children themselves. D'Épinay wanted women to share their experiences with each other in order to settle upon the best method of education. In the "Avertissement sur la seconde édition" to *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, she writes, "[i]l serait sans doute à désirer que toute mère attentive voulût confier au public les fruits de son expérience. Ce serait un sûr moyen de jeter des fondements permanents et solides pour une éducation générale et raisonnée."<sup>39</sup> Long before John Dewey, d'Épinay used journalistic means to broadcast her ideas and the fruits of her experience to her community. Besides publishing most of *Lettres à mon fils* in the *Correspondance littéraire*, whose readers only comprised a small circle, but an elite and powerful one, d'Épinay was also the "dame occupée sérieusement de l'éducation de ses enfans" profiled in the much more widely-read *Mercur de France*. Like Beck's informants who wanted to reduce the drop-out rate by changing public education, d'Épinay wanted to change society by changing education.

Did Beck and her informants have any idea d'Épinay existed? While we have no way of knowing, it seems likely that if they did, they would have known of her as a *salon* hostess and

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<sup>39</sup> D'Épinay, *Les Conversations d'Émilie*, 48-49.

ex-friend of Rousseau. They did not need to know about the true extent of her educational contributions in order to participate in the phonics movement, educate their children, share their ideas, and write. But if it is true that, as Virginia Woolf put it, women writing “think back through [their] mothers,”<sup>40</sup> then there is a lot of value in knowing that women have, at various times and places, repeated the same pattern of observing what is best for their children, speaking out, and trying to change society for the better by writing to try to change the dominant models of education. It is important for women to know their history, and it is important for everyone to know that women who do such things are not outliers, exceptional women; they are just women. Also, it might save us the mental energy that comes from thinking that we have to reinvent the wheel, start from scratch each time. We could see ourselves as building on past gains and take encouragement from that fact. We could find inspiration in the strategies used by women pedagogues of the past.

Furthermore, in this age of feminized education in which the majority of contingent faculty members and elementary school teachers are women and in which teaching is an undervalued, underpaid profession for which many people feel contempt, it is important for people to know that behind some of the great theories that have shaped education in the west were more women than we think. It was not the case that only men came up with the great ideas, which they then gave to the women who are the practitioners. Women’s thought is as much a part of the institutional architecture of education as men’s.

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<sup>40</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 75.

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