

MONTAIGNE READ BY AND THROUGH  
GOURNAY THE WRITER:  
THE EXAMPLE OF *CONFÉRENCE*<sup>1</sup>

Did Marie de Gournay change Michel de Montaigne? Before or after his death? And is she still changing him now?

Such questions have been much asked, on at least four interconnected levels. First, did Gournay the editor change the actual text of the *Essais*?<sup>2</sup> Secondly, did the young Gournay, through her conversation or her writing, change any opinions held by Montaigne the historical person, notably on women? Her writing and sending of the manuscript of the *Proumenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne* to him in 1588, complete with feminist themes, has been persuasively interpreted as evidence of her desire to effect such a change in him.<sup>3</sup> And it seems possible, though not certain, that she succeeded to some extent, judging from the evidence of the *Essais*.<sup>4</sup>

But I will be asking such questions on the remaining two levels.

Thirdly, did Gournay change the *Essais* through *imitatio* in certain of her writings,<sup>5</sup> thereby in a sense changing Montaigne

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1 I am very grateful to Warren Boutcher, Emily Butterworth, and Liz Guild for ideas and references and to Philippe Desan for sending me material. I thank the British Academy for a Research Readership, during the tenure of which this paper was written.

2 See the essay by Philippe Desan in the present volume.

3 See F. Cholakian, 'The Identity of the Reader in Marie de Gournay's *Le Proumenoir de Monsieur de Montaigne* (1594)', in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, ed. S. Fisher and J. Halley, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989, 207-32; 212-13; F. Cholakian, 'Reading the Daughter's Desire', *Montaigne Studies*, 8: 1-2, 1996, 145-58; 150-2.

4 On the negative side, the absence of evidence that Montaigne wrote back to Gournay about the *Proumenoir* can be interpreted as a sign of disapproval (Cholakian, 'The Identity of the Reader', 223). On the positive side, a new emphasis on 'l'institution et l'usage' rather than on nature as accounting for differences between the sexes (III, 5, 897) could be attributable to Gournay's influence in 1588 (C. Insdorf, *Montaigne and Feminism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1977, ch. 5). The controversial, much discussed eulogy of Gournay in II, 17, 661-662c, can be interpreted as evidence either of her success (if it is by Montaigne) or of her desire (if by her).

5 As opposed to the numerous texts by her which were far more distant from the *Essais*.

even after his death? Like countless Renaissance writers, Gournay herself seems to have seen such *imitatio* as a continuation of friendship, as a relationship between persons as well as between texts:<sup>6</sup> in her view, whereas *amour* requires physical presence and sight, *amitié* can exist without them, whether before she meets Montaigne, merely having read his *Essais*,<sup>7</sup> or else after his death.

Fourthly, does that process of change have a life beyond Gournay's own death? Is it still going on now? Given Montaigne's canonical status, most people will read him first and Gournay second. If they then re-read him, inevitably reading him *through* her, then what difference, if any, does she make? Has she changed him for the reader? This fourth level, while apparently more extraneous, is in fact a seamless extension of the third. And it has become all the more pertinent in recent years as Gournay has been read more and more.

I will examine Gournay's capacity to change Montaigne by considering their treatment of one specific theme: *conférence*. However, like the other, related themes which these two writers most obviously share – such as friendship, *imitatio*, education,<sup>8</sup> language, or the sexes – *conférence* is especially agonizing for her as a woman writer because it is not *just* a theme, not *just* a topic upon which opinions can be exchanged, but it is also worryingly reflexive: the nature of two parties' opinions on *conférence*

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6 On *imitatio* as personal as well as textual for Gournay and in Renaissance poetics more generally, see C. M. Bauschatz, 'Imitation, Writing, and Self-Study in Marie de Gournay's 1595 'Préface' to Montaigne's *Essais*', in *Contending Kingdoms: Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France*, ed. M.-R. Logan and L. Rudnytsky, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991, 346-64; 352-6. On Gournay's reasons for avoiding conceptualizing her relationship with Montaigne's text in terms of *amour*, see Bauschatz, 'Imitation', 357.

7 'Pour engendrer l'amour, l'intelligence corporelle et spirituelle, la presence et la veuë sont autant requise que le discours: mais la bien-veillance ou amitié, comme estant une intelligence toute spirituelle, doit germer spirituellement, par le pur discours et la cognoissance: bien qu'elle se puisse enrichir de presence' (Gournay, 1635 preface to the *Essais*, in *Les Idées littéraires de Mlle de Gournay*, ed. A. Uildriks, Groningen: Rodop, 1962, 184-207; 196). The 1635 preface has also been edited by Desan in *Montaigne Studies*, 2:2, 1990, 58-98.

8 Recent editors of Gournay assert that 'Sur les questions de pédagogie, Gournay puise son inspiration chez Montaigne' (Gournay, *Les Advis, ou, les Presens*, ed. J.-Beaulieu and H. Fournier, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1997-, i, 16); but no detailed comparison between Montaigne and Gournay's writings on education has yet been undertaken, to my knowledge.

determines whether they can have an exchange of opinions about *conférence* (or anything else) in the first place.

Thus, as Patricia Cholakian has shown in relation to the theme of friendship in Gournay's *Apologie pour celle qui escrit* (1626), given Gournay's desire to include women within that theme, her 'imitation' of Montaigne (and Cicero) is inevitably highly 'conflictual'.<sup>9</sup> The same goes for her treatment of *conférence*.

Although Gournay knew all of the *Essais* intimately – not least because she prepared eleven editions of them – some seem to have preoccupied her particularly, including 'De l'art de conferer' (III, 8). In versions of her preface to the *Essais* between 1599 and 1635, she privileges 'l'art de conferer' as one of the fourteen themes to have received ample treatment by Montaigne, another being friendship.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, she practises *imitatio* of III, 8 – without mentioning that *essai* – in the extraordinary passage beginning 'Bien heureux es tu, Lecteur ...' which comes near the start of her 1595 preface.<sup>11</sup> The passage begins by stating that the reader is blessed if not a woman, such are the moral, material, and discursive restrictions placed on women. It then focuses in particular on the ways in which men undermine women who seek to participate in public discussions with them. What has all this got to do with the *Essais*? The passage arises out of Gournay's claim that she has the

9 F. Cholakian, 'The economics of friendship: Gournay's *Apologie pour celle qui escrit*', *Montaigne et Marie de Gournay: Actes du colloque international de Duke*, ed. M. Tetel, Paris, 1997, 143-58 (esp. 144). For assessments of Gournay's representation – in her 1595 preface to the *Essais* – of her friendship with Montaigne as on a par with his friendship with La Boétie, see D.N. Losse, 'Triple contexture: La Boétie, Montaigne, Marie de Gournay et l'amitié: prétexte, texte et édition de 1595', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 8, 1996, 145-51; F. Rigolot, 'L'amitié intertextuelle: Etienne de la Boétie et Marie de Gournay', in *L'Esprit et la Lettre: Mélanges offerts à Jules Brody*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1991, 57-66. On Montaigne and La Boétie, see also the essay by Nancy Frelick in the present volume.

10 Gournay, 'Préface de 1599 publiée dans *Le Proumenoir*', ed. A.L. Franchetti, *Montaigne Studies*, 8: 1-2, 1996: 179-92; 184. This 1599 preface was published separately from the *Essais* together with Gournay's *Proumenoir*. See also the 1635 preface (*Les Idées littéraires*, 191). Another explicit reference to 'De l'art de conferer' was added to the preface in the 1617 version ('Preface to the 1617 Edition of the *Essais*', ed. M. McKinley, *Montaigne Studies*, 8: 1-2, 1996, 79-91; 212); it was still there in the 1635 version (*Les Idées littéraires*, 194).

11 Gournay, 'Préface de l'édition des *Essais* de Montaigne, Paris: Abel L'Angelier, 1595', ed. F. Rigolot, *Montaigne Studies*, 1, 1989, 7-60; 27-8.

credentials to judge the *Essais*. Implicitly, she has the right to *conférer* with her reader about the value of the *Essais* because she has previously *conféré* with Montaigne the man: later in the preface her claim to have enjoyed with Montaigne [what Olivier Millet has shown to be] a Stoic-style meeting of wise minds leads into the following description of any ‘sage’:

A qui veut-on apres qu’il declare tant de belles conceptions? qu’il confere et discoure ... sinon à quelque suffisance semblable? (48)<sup>12</sup>

As the ‘Bien heureux’ passage shows, Gournay has to claim these credentials in a defensive way, since a woman is normally credited with neither the capacity for proper action or speech nor with ‘le credit d’en estre creu, ou pour le moins escouté’ (27). Since this woman is defending the *Essais* against its detractors, her credibility thus becomes inseparable from the text’s reputation, as François Rigolot has observed.<sup>13</sup> Whether Gournay is trying to establish female authority above all in order to promote the *Essais* or whether she is mainly using the *Essais* in order to legitimate female authority is an unanswerable question.

Indeed, this very uncertainty, and the *apparently* digressive status of this passage, are symptoms of the awkwardness of Gournay’s position as a young woman introducing the work of a great dead man. As Cathleen Bauschatz has shown, in the 1595 preface Gournay partly seeks to minimize that awkwardness through *imitatio* of Montaigne’s text and person, yet her own femaleness repeatedly disrupts the *imitatio*, which presupposes a male imitator.<sup>14</sup> On the theme of *conférence*, the personal *imitatio* elsewhere takes the form of a very precise claim:

12 In the 1617 version of the preface ‘confere et discoure’ is solidified into ‘la conference et la societé’ (‘Preface to the 1617 edition’, 218). For the Stoic context, see O. Millet, ‘Les préfaces et le rôle de Marie de Gournay dans la première réception des *Essais*’, *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 8, 1996, 79-91; 83.

13 Rigolot, Introduction to Gournay 1595 ‘Préface’, 17.

14 Bauschatz, ‘Imitation’. Gournay’s most striking claim to *imitatio* of Montaigne’s person – ‘sauf le plus et le moins, j’estois toute semblable à mon Pere’ (1595 ‘Préface’, 45) – was cut, along with much other personal material, from the revised 1617 preface, as C. M. Bauschatz notes (“L’œil et la main”: gender and revision in Marie de Gournay’s “Préface de 1595”, *Montaigne Studies*, 7:1-2, 1995, 89-102; 99 n. 26).

Si je n'ai les vertus de mon second Père, j'ai quelques uns des vices qu'il avoue, surtout celui-ci, de m'impatienter vivement d'une conférence confuse.<sup>15</sup>

However, there is difference at the heart of this resemblance. The defective conversing which Montaigne describes himself in 'De l'art de conferer' as encountering is not specifically directed at him because of what he is – a male, for example – whereas that which Gournay describes herself in the 1595 preface as encountering *is* directed at her because of what she is, a woman. Unlike him, therefore, she has no hope of encountering anything *but* defective conversing. Moreover, in Montaigne's *essai* almost all the participants in *conférence* are explicitly or implicitly male. Women figure only as uncritical, easily impressed audiences of a Master of Arts's pretentious jargon or else as babbling fishwives who are deemed superior to logicians (in an ironic move which assumes, however, that they are normally at the bottom of the conversational pile).<sup>16</sup> Thus, like countless authors on the art of conversation, Montaigne himself effects the very exclusion of which Gournay is complaining and which, paradoxically, now hampers her efforts to promote him.<sup>17</sup> This may be why she does not here refer explicitly to 'De l'art de conferer': she tends to

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15 Quoted in M. H. Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance. Marie le Jars de Gournay: Her Life and Works*, The Hague: Mouton, 1963, 27. (Ilsley gives no reference for this sentence, which I have been unable to locate in the 1595 preface or any other). This personal *imitatio* is also textual: see Montaigne's admission of impatience with his subordinates when conversing with them ('j'accuse mon impatience', III, 8, 928b).

16 *Essais*, III, 8, 927b. For an excellent analysis of the near-total exclusion of women from *conférence* in III, 8 and of their troubled inclusion in *commerce* in III, 3, see E. Guild, 'Montaigne's *commerce* with women: "Jusques où va la possibilité"?' in *Of Nets and (K)nots: Unravelling the Texture of Renaissance Knowledge*, ed. M. Tudeau-Clayton and P. Berry, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (forthcoming).

17 Cf. also *Essais*, I, 28, 186a: 'à dire vray, la suffisance ordinaire des femmes n'est pas pour respondre à cette conference et communication, nourrisse de cette sainte couture [*sc. amitié*]'. Montaigne's textual exclusions of women from *conférence* did not necessarily reflect his own social position in relation to some women: like other minor noblemen he was often known primarily through his association with noblewomen who were from much grander families. I am grateful to Warren Boutcher for pointing this out.

avoid such direct reference to the *Essais* whenever she is contradicting them most flagrantly.<sup>18</sup>

So this 'Bien heureux' passage is an example of what Mary McKinley has shown to be one of the kinds of *imitatio* which Gournay practises in the various versions of her preface: 'she loosely paraphrases the *Essais* without acknowledging her source and uses the borrowed material for a different purpose'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Gournay describes Montaigne himself as using this kind of imitative reorientation, which she calls 'application' of ancient authors:

les emprunts sont si dextrement adaptez, que le benefice de l'application, ou maintefois quelque enrichissement dont il les rehausse de son cru, contrepesent ordinairement le benefice de l'invention.<sup>20</sup>

In the 'Bien heureux' passage Gournay 're-applies' – that is, radically reorientates – 'De l'art de conferer' in this way. Montaigne's examples of defective conversing are transformed into ones of how men exclude women from conversation. Where Montaigne's defective conversers use 'grimaces' to imply some profound meaning (III, 8, 930b), Gournay's men merely have to use 'un soubris, un hochet ou quelque plaisanterie' to demolish her coherent arguments with the implication 'C'est une femme qui parle' (27). Just as Montaigne's defective conversers rely on 'la gravité, la robbe et la fortune' to compensate for the ineptness of their arguments (930b), one of Gournay's adversaries relies on his beard, another on his 'gravité', which hides the fact that he has nothing to say (27). The way in which Gournay enumerates such examples ('Tel ... Un autre ... Cettuy-là ... Cestuy-cy ... tel autre ... Cet autre ...' [27-8]) echoes the equivalent anaphoric list in 'De l'art de conferer' ('Qui ... Qui ... L'autre ... Celuy-là ... En voilà qui ... Et cettuy-cy ... Cet autre ...' [926b]). There are several other verbal echoes,<sup>21</sup> including the key verb *escouter*. Whereas

18 See Venesoen, 'Montaigne et l'Égalité des hommes et des femmes', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 22, 1992, 1-8; 4-5.

19 M. McKinley, 'An Editorial Revival: Gournay's 1617 Preface to the *Essais*', *Montaigne Studies*, 8:1-2, 1996, 193-201; 196.

20 Gournay, 1635 preface to the *Essais*, in *Les Idées littéraires*, 202. A version of this passage first appeared in the 1617 edition.

21 Both writers emphasize the importance of 'l'ordre et conduite de la dispute' (1595 'Préface', 27-8; 'de l'ordre et de la conduite', *Essais*, III, 8, 927b;c). Like Montaigne throughout III.8, Gournay describes bad and good

Montaigne urges that all opinions, even apparently superstitious ones, deserve to be listened to ('meritent aumoins qu'on les escoute' [923b]), Gournay envies men their right to have their words not necessarily believed, but at least listened to ('escouté' [27]).<sup>22</sup>

So the 'Bien heureux' passage is one of the most agonized – and so one of the most powerful – in this agonized 1595 preface: only by contradicting Montaigne can Gournay defend him.<sup>23</sup> The preface's awkward status, which depends on how it is read – as either essential for establishing Gournay's right to write the preface or else irrelevant and so over-concerned with her – is perhaps what led to its being cut from *all* five subsequent versions of the preface,<sup>24</sup> unlike many passages which were revised and reinstated in 1599 or, especially, in 1617, when Gournay reversed her traumatic decision to sever the long preface from the *Essais*.<sup>25</sup> So the 'Bien heureux' passage is, as Bauschatz notes, a 'special case', especially because after an absence of 31 years it did reappear, revised and expanded, to form the first half of the *Grief des dames*, which appeared in her collected works, *L'Ombre*

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debating in terms of 'foiblesse' (27) and 'force' (28). Her adoption of this potentially gendered terminology when describing poetic language too, in 1619, has been noted by C. M. Bauschatz ('Marie de Gournay and the Crisis of Humanism', in *Humanism in Crisis: The Decline of the French Renaissance*, ed. Desan, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991, 279-94; 281-2). The 'Bien heureux' passage in the 1595 preface does not echo only III.8: *essais* I, 25 and I, 26 are also 're-applied' in the condemnation of some male interlocutors who simply spit out useless knowledge 'comme s'il estoit question de rendre compte de sa leçon et non pas de répondre' (28).

22 My answer to the question – 'What does Gournay seem to want?' – would be not only recognition (J.-Beaulieu and H. Fournier, 'Pratiques dialogiques et réécriture dans l'œuvre de Marie de Gournay', *Neophilologus*, 83: 3, 1998, 357-67; 362) or validation of her literary qualifications (Cholakian, 'Reading the Daughter's Desire') but, more generally, to be properly listened to.

23 Cf. E. Berriot-Salvadore's comment on Gournay's writing in general: 'la fidélité au père – parler le langage de la raison – suppose alors une démarche émancipatrice qui l'éloigne foncièrement de la 'sagesse' des *Essais*' ('L'héritage de Montaigne ou les voies de l'émancipation de Marie de Gournay', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 8: 1-3, 1996, 153-60; 158).

24 1598, 1599, 1617, 1625, 1635.

25 On this temporary retraction, see Desan, 'Marie de Gournay et le travail éditorial des *Essais* entre 1595 et 1635: idéologie et stratégies textuelles', *Montaigne et Marie de Gournay: Actes du colloque international de Duke*, ed. M. Tetel, Paris: Champion, 1997, 79-103; 86-8; McKinley, 'An Editorial Revival', 194; Rigolot, Introduction to Gournay, 1595 'Préface', 11-13.

(1626).<sup>26</sup> Thus the passage was first cut – just as feminist passages were cut in the 1599, printed *Proumemoir*<sup>27</sup> – and it was then eventually integrated into an autonomous feminist work not attached to the *Essais*. This example therefore confirms McKinley's thesis that Gournay tends from 1617 onwards to make editorial decisions about the preface with a view to her own, other, autonomous projects.<sup>28</sup>

And yet, paradoxically, when the 'Bien heureux' passage does reappear in 1626 – reappropriated thus as part of Gournay's own *œuvre*, separate from the *Essais* – in other ways its connections to 'De l'art de conferer' are now *stronger* and more explicit than in 1595. *More* phrases from that *essai* are now incorporated: he who resorts to insults instead of arguments starts 'une querelle d'Allemaigne' (Montaigne) or 'une querelle d'Allemand' (Gournay); he who seeks to intimidate with academic jargon uses 'bastelage' (Montaigne) or 'bastelages logiques' (Gournay).<sup>29</sup> Most strikingly of all, the newly expanded passage now ends with a direct reference:

Ces trois mots soient dits sur la conferance, pour la part speciale et particuliere des Dames: car de l'art de conferer en general, et de ses

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26 Bauschatz, 'L'œil et la main', 99-100; Rigolot, Introduction to 1595 'Préface', 13. Neither provides detailed analysis of the passage itself. The *Grief* was republished with Gournay's collected works in 1634 and 1641. My references are to the version given in M. Schiff, *La Fille d'alliance de Montaigne: Marie de Gournay*, Paris: Champion, 1910, 89-97 (based on the 1626 edition).

27 See Cholakian, 'The Identity of the Reader', 224-5. Gournay also cut, from her 1625-35 editions of the *Essais*, the feminist statement contained in the II, 17 eulogy of her (Bauschatz, 'L'œil et la main', 97-8). Gournay's self-editing has been compared with Montaigne's in respect of her *allongeails* and also contrasted with his in respect of her habit of cutting: see Bauschatz, 'L'œil et la main', 90; McKinley, 'An Editorial Revival', 195-6; Rigolot, Introduction to Gournay, 1595 'Préface', 18. On her self-editing in general, see A. L. Franchetti, 'L'ombre et le monument: Marie de Gournay éditrice de ses propres œuvres', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne*, 8: 1-3, 1996, 219-32.

28 McKinley, 'An Editorial Revival', 200-1. Gournay's earlier transferral of the long version of the *Essais* preface into the volume containing her own *Proumemoir* may itself have been an early manifestation of this tendency, since it served to detach the preface from Montaigne's corpus and attach it to her own (Cholakian, 'Reading the Daughter's Desire', 158).

29 See *Essais*, III, 8, 927b; Gournay in Schiff, *La Fille d'alliance*, 91, 93. Cf. also 'heurter rudement ma teste' (*Essais*, III, 8, 928b) and 'heurter sa precieuse teste' (Gournay in Schiff, *La Fille d'alliance*, 91).

perfections et deffaux, les Essais en traictent jusques au faiste de l'excellence. (93-4)

This prompted Gournay's pioneering biographer Marjorie Henry Ilsley to comment in passing that 'this treatise is in part a sort of feminine appendage' to 'De l'art de conferer'.<sup>30</sup> But *what* sort of appendage? Taken at face value, Gournay's reference presents her text as merely adding a particular detail to a general map that Montaigne has already established. But it is a detail that changes the whole map or a supplement that turns out to be essential. For if Gournay's reader then shuttles back to 'De l'art de conferer', that *essai* is likely to take on a different colour, revealing its own exclusion of women and its own occlusion of the ways in which *conférence* is gendered. Gournay refers to 'De l'art de conferer' because she wants her readers to read it, but to read it through the lens of *her* writing.

Furthermore, Gournay's use of a case that is 'speciale et particuliere' – that of women – to change Montaigne's map of 'l'art de conferer en general' may also be a gendered re-application, against Montaigne, of his own argument, in 'De l'art de conferer' and elsewhere, that 'jugemens en gros' are inadequate (III, 8, 943b). After all, the second half of the *Grief des Dames* attacks men who, 'condamnans le particulier par le general', refuse to read works by women. This argument that women are *not* all the same, that particulars are irreducible to the general, is a recurring theme in feminist writing by Gournay in the 1620s.<sup>31</sup>

But, like notions of equality and difference in modern feminism, the notion that the particular coincides with the general can be a burden or else an advantage strategically. Whereas that

30 Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance*, 210.

31 Cf. the 1626 *Apologie pour celle qui escrit*, Gournay, *Fragments d'un discours féminin*, ed. E. Dezon-Jones, Paris: José Corti, 1988, 147-83; 158: 'Parmi notre Vulgaire, on fagotte à fantaisie l'image des femmes Lettrées: c'est-à-dire, on compose d'elles une fricassée d'extravagances et de chimères: et dit-on en général, sans s'amuser aux exceptions ou distinctions, qu'elles sont jetées sur ce moule'. In the 1622 *Égalité des hommes et des femmes*, in Schiff, *La Fille d'alliance*, 55-86; 66-7, Gournay claims that Montaigne is on her side in distinguishing between particular women and woman in general: 'Il luy semble, dit il, et si ne sçait pourquoy, qu'il se trouve rarement des femmes dignes de commander aux hommes. N'est ce pas les mettre en particulier à l'egale contrebalance des hommes, et confesser, que s'il ne les y met en general il craint d'avoir tort: bien qu'il peust excuser sa restrinction, sur la pauvre et disgraciée nourriture de ce sexe'.

notion is sometimes *against* Gournay's interest, it can also be *in* her interest, helping her to appeal rhetorically to women readers as a group, as in the very title *Grief des dames*. Indeed, Gournay's detailed rewriting of the 'Bien heureux' passage builds stronger bridges from her to women in general as the targets of men conversing badly. For example, 'ne me r'embarre' (27) becomes 'ne les [*sc.* Dames] rembarre' (90).<sup>32</sup>

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So much for *conférence* as a theme of Gournay's writing. Where does that leave it in a reflexive sense, as a practice of hers? On a biographical level, Gournay seems to have been an avid practitioner of the art of conversation; she was considered to excel in it by at least one witness, the abbé de Marolles, who went out of his way to praise her 'agreable entretien'.<sup>33</sup> The importance which she must have attached to this art, even in relation to writing, can be inferred from her argument in the *Apologie pour celle qui escrit* that a dull mind can mask itself more easily through the composition of a book than through conversation.<sup>34</sup> From 1605 to 1615 she frequented the court of Marguerite de Valois, at which the Queen often proposed subjects around which conversation should revolve.<sup>35</sup> From 1615 to 1628 she seems to have frequented the salon of Madame des Loges.<sup>36</sup> She also held her own assemblies and gatherings, especially, it seems, from about the 1620s onwards.<sup>37</sup> The reality of these countless exchanges is lost to us, but we can perhaps presume that they furnished Gournay

32 And 'notre robe' is added (92). Cf. Bauschatz, 'L'œil et la main', 101-2: 'The *Grief* also presents itself as a general essay on the problems of *all* women – 'des Dames' – rather than a series of her *own* personal grievances (even though in 1595 that was what it seemed to be).'

33 Michel de Marolles, *Les Memoires*, Paris, 1656, 105 (entry for 1636). See also 58 (entry for 1623), concerning Charles de Retelois: 'Au reste Mademoiselle de Gournai estoit un de ses grands divertissements: et quoy qu'il fust d'une humeur assez galante, si est-ce qu'il n'y avoit point de Dame qu'il n'eust quittée pour entretenir celle-cy'. See Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance*, 143-4.

34 Gournay, *Fragments d'un discours féminin*, 153-4.

35 Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance*, 96-100.

36 Beaulieu and Fournier in Gournay, *Les Advis*, i, 33.

37 Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance*, 143-4. Beaulieu and Fournier, in Gournay, *Les Advis*, i, 33, claim that she hosted a 'salon littéraire' from 1627 till her death in 1645.

with ample evidence of the belittling techniques which she amplified in the 1626 *Grief*, just as her unhappy introduction to court circles in 1588<sup>38</sup> – after adolescent years which she later described as being devoid of educational *conférence*<sup>39</sup> – may have been one inspiration for the original ‘Bien heureux’ passage of 1595.

Yet for Gournay, as for Montaigne, *conférence* involved not only conversation but also reading and indeed writing. We have more evidence about it as a practice of hers in this sense than as verbal conversation. As I said at the start, she seems to have conceived of her *imitatio* of Montaigne – even at its most conflictual – as dialogic friendship. For she describes in strikingly similar terms the epistemological reasons why the *Essais* are incomplete and why a person needs a friend. On the one hand, in the 1599 version of her preface Gournay defends the incompleteness with which Montaigne and writers like Plato handle their themes:

manier, à leur mode, un point tout entier, n'est autre chose que le laisser à manier tout entier encores, comme une source inépuisable, à cent autres escrivains qui viendront apres.<sup>40</sup>

This ‘manquement’ in the handling of themes, even the fourteen fullest ones – which include ‘l’art de conferer’ – is epistemologically inevitable:

Puis qu'estans hommes, ne nous peult faire veoir une chose pleinement et parfaitement, que les autheurs s'efforcent à faire que nous les voyons au moins toutes, ou plusieurs, le moins imparfaitement qu'il se puisse. (185).

The importance which Gournay attached to the whole of this passage of hers is indicated by the fact that it was a rare addition

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38 Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance*, 25-6.

39 Following the death of her father in 1577, her mother took the family in 1580 ‘en Picardie, à Gournay, lieu reculé des commodités d’apprendre les sciences par enseignement ni par conférence’ (1616 *Copie de la vie de la damoiselle de Gournay*, in *Fragments d’un discours féminin*, 137-9; 138).

40 ‘Préface de 1599’, 185.

to the 1599 version of the preface, which overall was about a third shorter than the 1595 original.<sup>41</sup>

A few pages later, having turned to the apparently different theme of the need felt by the 'sage' for a kindred great mind, Gournay gives such elite friendship exactly the same epistemological ground:

La cognoissance de ceste sienne chetifve condition humaine, ne luy permettant pas au surplus de s'asseurer, ny qu'il face, ny qu'il juge bien de luy mesme par tout, l'oblige à desirer un autre sage pour reformateur de ses devoirs. (192)<sup>42</sup>

For Gournay, correcting the 'manquement' of Montaigne's treatment of the theme of conversation was a way of continuing her critical conversation with her dead friend.

But Gournay the writer seems to have seen herself as oscillating painfully between participation in, and withdrawal from, *conférence*. Following the plea in the 1595 preface for her judgement on the *Essais* to be listened to, the short 1598 retraction was a non-preface in that it announced the editor's temporary, provisional withdrawal from her half of the dialogue with readers about the *Essais* (perhaps because the 1595 preface had been more denigrated than listened to). The 1598 version ends:

Si je me renforce à l'advenir, je t'en dirai, sinon ce qu'il faudroit, au moins ce que je pense et ce que je sçay: ou si je ne sçay rien, encore prendray-je la plume pour te prier de m'apprendre ce que tu sçauras. Pour ceste heure, dis-je, ne te donneray rien que mes oreilles afin d'ouyr quel sera ton advis sur ce livre. Que t'en semble donc Lecteur?<sup>43</sup>

While self-denigration is particularly extreme here, it occurs elsewhere in the young Gournay's writing, albeit always with a possible tinge of irony. For example, in the 1595 preface the 'Bien heureux' passage ends with an extraordinary switch in focus from men to Gournay herself as a frustratingly fallible interlocutor, with

41 See A.L. Franchetti, 'Marie de Gournay apologiste des *Essais*: la préface de 1599', *Montaigne Studies*, 8: 1-2, 1996, 173-7; 177. The passage was retained in the 1617 preface.

42 A version of this passage was already present in the original 1595 preface (49). Gournay eventually grafted the passage into her essay *Que par nécessité les grands esprits et les gens de bien cherchent leurs semblables* (Gournay, *L'Ombre*, Paris, 1626, 371-84; 381).

43 Quoted in Rigolot, Introduction to Gournay, 1595 'Préface', 12.

slow wit, poor memory, and a painfully blushing face, all of which deny her the hearing she deserves (28). These lines were among the few in the 1595 preface never to return in any other version or indeed in any other work by Gournay.<sup>44</sup> It is as if she quickly learned – perhaps following the traumatic reception of the 1595 preface – that, because of her position as a woman, self-deprecation in dialogue with her readers was a luxury she could afford much less than could Montaigne (whose own confession of faults such as poor memory Gournay defended in her prefaces from 1599 onwards).<sup>45</sup> Certainly, she continues in later years to state both that her writing is open to being corrected by the judgements of others and also that it corrects others through her own judgement.<sup>46</sup> But, as Jean-Philippe Beaulieu and Hannah Fournier have shown, Gournay's later writing is often dialogic mainly in the sense that it responds to detractors, which it does much more regularly than Montaigne's; she practises 'une forme défensive de dialogisme, qui sans être la plus ouverte à l'autre (et pour cause!), fait un usage systématique bien qu'indirect du discours d'autrui'.<sup>47</sup> Montaigne can afford to be more open to the opinions of others, whether in conversation or writing, because he is speaking or writing from a social position of strength. So Gournay the writer is, to adapt Anna Lia Franchetti's felicitous phrase, an 'être de dialogue',<sup>48</sup> although she might at times seem univocal<sup>49</sup> or else marginalized beyond all dialogue.<sup>50</sup> Re-reading Montaigne's kind of dialogic writing through the prism of her own

44 Bauschatz, 'L'œil et la main', 99-100.

45 Franchetti, 'Marie de Gournay apologiste', 177. The distance travelled by 1626 can be measured by the new sentence in the *Grief* with which Gournay admits that she herself has suffered insolent treatment in conversation: 'Et suis si peu, ou pour mieux dire si fort glorieuse, que je ne crains pas d'advotier, que je le sçay de ma propre experience.' (90). The phrase 'si peu ... glorieuse' contains a fleeting echo of the painful self-deprecation of the 1595 preface, as if being humiliated should be a source of shame. But the *correctio* 'ou pour mieux dire si fort glorieuse' shows that the link between humiliation and shame has been evoked only now to be dispelled.

46 See *L'Ombre*, sig. \* ijv, 82; *Les Advis*, i, 54.

47 Beaulieu and Fournier, 'Pratiques dialogiques', 364.

48 Franchetti uses the phrase to describe Gournay's view of the human being; 'Marie de Gournay apologiste', 173.

49 The view of A. Uildriks, as Beaulieu and Fournier note ('Pratiques dialogiques', 364).

50 The view of E. Berriot-Salvadore, for whom Gournay is necessarily 'une voix étrangère et singulière'; 'L'héritage de Montaigne', 159.

changes one's perception of his, revealing that his relative openness to the Other is made possible by a secure sense that he is not in danger of being socially destroyed by that Other.<sup>51</sup>

Neil Kenny  
*Churchill College, Cambridge*

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51 This danger of social destruction is thematized by Gournay especially in terms of calumny, as is demonstrated by Emily Butterworth in her unpublished doctoral work, currently in progress.