

This Quarrel Which is Not One. Women's Interventions in an Eighteenth-Century French Quarrel about Boys' Education.

Abstract

This article explores the women's interventions in an overlooked eighteenth-century quarrel about how to reform literary teaching in the boys' *collèges*. It begins by introducing this quarrel, which I call the *Querelle des collèges*, and which involved over 120 actors: just three of whom are known to be women. After presenting the quarrel texts written by Adelaïde d'Espinassy, Joséphine de Montbart, and Anne d'Aubourg de La Bove, comtesse de Miremont, the article explores why and how these women engaged in such a highly-publicised, male-dominated quarrel. They intervened, I show, so as to redirect public interest in reforming boys' schools towards the reform of girls' education. And they employed creative strategies to minimise the risk they ran, as women, by quarrelling. By embedding their texts in other, existing disputes concerning women, and by engaging creatively with agonistic discursive practices usually reserved for men, these women destabilized this masculine dispute. In so doing, they reclaimed some room in this quarrel (and others like it) for women.

Education was the hot topic in mid-eighteenth-century France. Following the expulsion of the Jesuits (1761-1764)—France's most famous early modern teaching order, who ran many *collèges*—and the publication of Rousseau's controversial novel, *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), a great polemic about education emerged. This quarrel was specifically about how to reform literary teaching practices in the *collèges*, the schools for boys aged from around eight to eighteen years old, and it was a quarrel almost exclusively constituted of male actors, including *philosophes*, *professeurs*, and *parlementaires*. Perhaps owing to the fact that this dispute had no single contemporary name (unlike some early modern quarrels), no scholars have yet conceived of it as a *querelle*, yet *querelle* it was.¹ This paper begins, then, by

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¹ Tidman presents the *Querelle* in *Ce qui s'enseigne* and in the forthcoming *Querelle des collèges*. Historians have studied some of the *Querelle*'s texts from different angles and have emphasised to different degrees the agonism of the debate; see,

describing the content, actors, and stakes of this polemic, showing both that it was conceived of as a quarrel at its time of writing, and that it possesses the discursive features we now expect of a quarrel. To make the form of this debate clearer to modern readers, I call it the *Querelle des collèges*.²

At face value, this quarrel had almost nothing to do with women. While French debates about women's education had been intensifying since the seventeenth century, in particular following Poulain de la Barre's publications in the 1670s and Fénelon's *Éducation des filles* (1687), the *Querelle des collèges* mostly overlooked this matter. Surprisingly, though, three women did intervene in the *Querelle*: Adelaïde d'Espinassy (17??-1777?), in her *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles* (1764); Joséphine de Montbart (1750-1829), in *Sophie, ou l'éducation des filles* (1777); and Anne d'Aubourg de La Bove, comtesse de Miremont (1735-1811), in the *Traité de l'éducation des femmes, et cours complet d'instruction* (1779-1789). As Jean Bloch and Sonia Cherrad note in their recent works on eighteenth-century French writing on women's education, these authors were among a vanguard of women who amplified debates about girls' education from the second half of the century. It is all the more striking, then, that they have received such little critical attention.

The second part of this paper shows how these women engage with the *Querelle des collèges*, but quickly move beyond its usual concerns towards parallel educational matters that affected women—matters that were the subject of existing quarrels, such as the *Querelle des femmes* and the *Querelle du roman*. By situating their texts at the

notably, Marguerite Figeac-Monthus, Natasha Gill, Marcel Grandière, Dominique Julia, Adrian O'Connor, and R. R. Palmer.

² For a detailed account of the reasons for attributing this name, see Tidman (*Ce qui s'enseigne* 100-3).

intersection of several quarrels, Espinassy, Montbart, and Miremont refuse to be bound by the male-defined parameters of the *Querelle des collèges*. These women challenge the very premise of the *Querelle*, namely, that it is boys' education that urgently requires reform. Moreover, by rhetorically denying that they are quarrelling, and by subtly modifying certain male-defined norms of agonistic discourse, they negotiate a space for women in this polemic.

In that they exceed the thematic and discursive bounds of this dispute, one might question whether Espinassy, Montbart, and Miremont are participating in the same debate as their male counterparts, or even whether they are quarreling at all. This article will show, however, that they are, and in ways that are both creative and strategic. By connecting the *Querelle des collèges* to existing disputes concerning women, and by engaging creatively with agonistic discursive practices usually reserved for men in this period, these women destabilize a dispute otherwise exclusively written by Frenchmen, about future Frenchmen; in so doing, they reclaim a degree of power for themselves, and for other women.

The Querelle des collèges (1762-1789)

The *Querelle des collèges* was a dispute about how to reform literary teaching in the French *collèges* which began in 1762, following the expulsion of the Jesuits and the publication of Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'éducation*. However, many *Querelleurs* traced the origins of their dispute to 1753, and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* article

“Collège”. D’Alembert attacks the *collèges*, often run by religious orders.³ He claims that a *collégien* spends years learning almost nothing but Latin, via pedantic exercises of translation and composition, and leaves school with “la connoissance très-imparfaite d’une langue morte, avec des préceptes de Rhétorique & des principes de Philosophie qu’il doit tâcher d’oublier” (635). D’Alembert argues that such knowledge is useless to most boys in their future career (and therefore useless to the nation). Instead, he would have pupils spend most of their time studying French. In an eighteenth-century echo of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, d’Alembert wishes “qu’on ne se bornât pas à lire des auteurs anciens, & à les faire admirer quelquefois assez mal-à-propos; qu’on eût le courage de les critiquer souvent, les comparer avec les auteurs modernes, & de faire voir en quoi nous avons de l’avantage ou du désavantage sur les Romains & sur les Grecs” (637).⁴

This article was not an intervention in the *Querelle des collèges* at its time of publication; in 1753 the *Querelle* did not exist, nor was it created by immediate reactions to d’Alembert’s article. However, as Robert Granderoute suggests, and as I argue elsewhere, d’Alembert’s article was dragged into the *Querelle* in the 1760s, ’70s, and ’80s by writers who, in hindsight, saw in it the beginnings of their dispute (*Ce qui s’enseigne* 108-10, 163-6). D’Alembert raises many of the questions that were later debated in the *Querelle*: Should French authors be taught instead of the Latin classics, and if so, which? Which pedagogical exercises would teach the skills of

³ For a history of the *collèges* and their teaching practices, see Marie-Madeleine Compère.

⁴ Larry Norman cautions against oversimplifying the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* by viewing all subsequent literary debates that oppose past and present as extensions of this quarrel (13-4). Following Norman, I read d’Alembert’s article as replaying some of the themes of this *Querelle* in a new context, with different stakes.

taste, judgement, and eloquence? What sort of boys should attend the *collèges*, who should their teachers be, and how should they be recruited and trained?

The latter became a critical matter following the expulsion of the Jesuits, which reached its peak in 1762.⁵ By this date the Jesuits ran over 100 *collèges*: around a third of all those in France, and the largest proportion held by a single order.⁶ The suppression of the Order left tens of thousands of boys without teachers. France had a crisis on its hands, but this crisis also presented an opportunity: with the Jesuits gone, their teaching practices discredited, *collège*-level teaching might finally be reformed. But how? One ‘solution’ that appeared almost immediately, which was not really a solution at all, came in the form of probably the most famous eighteenth-century French text on education, Rousseau’s *Émile, ou de l’éducation*. With his private, negative education of Émile, which shuns Latin and most book learning, Rousseau rejects the model of communal, literary education promoted by “ces risibles établissements qu’on appelle collèges” (250). Recognising the existence of the *Querelle des collèges* therefore allows us to recontextualize *Émile* and to see it not only as a work that stimulated interest in education, but as one that was itself, in part, a response to growing anti-*collège* discourse. Indeed, given its publication in May 1762, just as the Jesuits were being ousted, many contemporary readers saw *Émile* as a polemical intervention in the nascent dispute about how (or whether) to reform the

⁵ Although the royal edict suppressing the Jesuits was not issued until November, 1764, the *parlements* began moving to expel the Order in August 1761, and by mid-1762 most Jesuit *collèges* were abandoned. For more on the Jesuit expulsion, see O’Connor (509-17) and Van Kley (90-107).

⁶ O’Connor (48) follows John McManners (509) in calculating 111 Jesuit *collèges* in 1761, while Julia (*Trois couleurs* 18) and Figeac-Monthus (22) put the figure at 106.

collèges, and they set about responding to Rousseau in significant numbers.⁷ So began the *Querelle des collèges*. As Grimm observed in April 1763, “Depuis la chute des Jésuites et le livre inutile de J.-J. Rousseau, intitulé *Emile*, on n’a cessé d’écrire sur l’éducation” (125). By 1789, when the Revolution changed the terms of educational debates, the *Querelle des collèges* had seen over 200 published interventions.⁸

For reasons of space the summary of the *Querelle* here must remain brief, but it is nonetheless helpful to study a small segment of its interactions between men, to help better contextualise women’s interventions. One of the most influential texts in the *Querelle* was the *Essai d’éducation nationale, ou plan d’études pour la jeunesse* (1763) by Breton *parlementaire*, Louis-René de Caradeuc de La Chalotais (1701-1785). Having been a key campaigner against the Jesuits, in his *Essai* La Chalotais turns to what to do with the *collèges* now the Jesuits are gone. Like d’Alembert he argues that French, not Latin, should be the focus of a *collège* education: “Il faut donner le pas à la Langue maternelle: elle est la plus nécessaire dans le cours de la vie” (16). Similarly, he prescribes a syllabus that includes secular, French texts—sometimes by living authors, notably Voltaire—on the grounds that “il est honteux que dans une éducation de France on néglige la Littérature Françoise” (69). Boys will benefit from studying modern “littérature”, La Chalotais claims, insofar as it will give them the skills “pour remplir les différentes professions” (7), by which he means elite professions such as lawyers, doctors, clergy. In his view, the sons of labourers, farmers, and tradesmen are not to attend a *collège* (28).

⁷ For more on Rousseau’s place in the *Querelle* and responses to *Émile* in the context of the *Querelle*, see Tidman, *Querelle des collèges*.

⁸ An initial corpus of the *Querelle*, which includes standalone publications and articles in the *Année littéraire*, is in Tidman, *Ce qui s’enseigne* 229-67. An updated corpus, including *Mercure de France* and *Journal de Trévoux* articles, will appear in Tidman, *Querelle des collèges*. The figure given here relates to the updated corpus.

Shortly after the publication of the *Essai*, an anonymous pamphlet appeared entitled *Difficultés proposées à Monsieur de La Chalotais, sur le mémoire intitulé 'Essai d'éducation nationale'* (1763). It has been attributed to Jean-Baptiste-Louis Crevier (1693-1765), a Jansenist former professor of rhetoric at the Parisian Collège de Beauvais. Countering La Chalotais, Crevier argues that sacred texts offer better models for young people than secular ones (22-4). He is outraged (on behalf of the public, he says) that *philosophes* such as Voltaire should be deemed modern greats. “Il faut vous le dire, monsieur”, writes Crevier, addressing La Chalotais, “le public sensé est affligé de voir un Magistrat célèbre appeler . . . indéfiniment & sans restriction, *Voltaire un génie supérieur*” (55). La Chalotais and Crevier’s disagreements are, at root, about the nation for which boys are being formed. For La Chalotais, the nation is France, but for Crevier, “l’homme est à Dieu avant que d’appartenir à l’état” (30). On these grounds, Crevier argues that excluding the sons of manual workers from the *collèges* denies them the chance to become literate, and illiterate children—according to Jansenist beliefs—cannot know God, since they cannot read the Bible (17). God’s subjects require a different sort of literary education to those of Louis XV. Sadly for him, Crevier gained few supporters. In September 1763, in the *Correspondance littéraire*, Grimm quipped, “je ne sais quel est le triste et plat pédant qui a proposé des *Difficultés à M. de La Chalotais*, qui est le seul ouvrage digne d’un magistrat et d’un homme d’État que nous ayons vu depuis nombre d’années” (362). La Chalotais’s *Essai*, meanwhile, was endorsed by fifteen quarrel texts.

In “The Language of Quarrels”, Alexis Tadié identifies a series of linguistic and discursive features that quarrels often—though not always—share. Put schematically, Tadié finds that quarrels generally:

- play out in language, or at least involve an initial linguistic act (82);
- begin not with an initial statement, but an affronted or contrary response (82);
- can be designated by different terms (for instance, in French, ‘disputes’, ‘controverses’, ‘polémiques’) (82);
- feature more agonistic than irenic vocabulary (82);
- have a judge, even if only the public (83);
- thrive on publicity, often in the press (83);
- are often dialogical, with a text/response/further text structure (84);
- may be about something other than what they appear to be (93);
- regularly intersect with other quarrels (93).

Early modern French quarrels bear out these observations, as scholars have shown.⁹

From the glimpse of the *Querelle des collèges* above we see that it, too, has almost all of the features Tadié identifies. What is more, it was conceived of contemporaneously as a *querelle*, even if that label was not systematically used. While the debate was still underway, for example, some readers were already compiling ‘recueils’ of *Querelle* texts—arranging them in an order that highlighted their dialogical interactions—and

⁹ Much recent work has stemmed from the ANR-funded ‘Projet AGON’ research project on early modern French and British quarrels, <<http://www.agon.paris-sorbonne.fr/fr>> [accessed 2 April 2020]. For a selection of recent scholarship, see the collections of articles edited by Gérard Ferreyrolles; Jeanne-Marie Hostiou and Alain Viala; and Hostiou and Tadié.

librarians were cataloguing *Querelle* texts together.¹⁰ Many contemporary commentators also recognised (and contributed to) the agonism of the dispute. An *Année littéraire* article of 1782 argues that in recent decades, “tandis que des savans s’appliquent dans la retraite à former des citoyens pour l’état, de prétendus beaux esprits, d’agréables ignorans, des parasites & des bouffons couverts du manteau de la philosophie, déclament à la table des riches, contre les *pédans* & les *colleges*” (98). In short, this debate that has not previously been seen as a quarrel was, and is, one. However, what is less clear is women’s place in this dispute.

This Quarrel Which Is Not One, or Two, but Three

Of some 120 actors in the *Querelle* whose gender is now known, just three are women. This is hardly surprising, and not just because this particular quarrel was about boys’ education. Women risked vilification for daring to publish, in the period, let alone daring to quarrel. The abbé Augustin-Simon Iraitlh (1717-1794), in his four-volume anthology of quarrels, the *Querelles littéraires, ou Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire des révolutions de la république des lettres, depuis Homère jusqu’à nos jours* (1761), treats women who quarrel with misogynistic disdain. In describing a quarrel between Marie de Gournay and Racan, he delights in recounting de Gournay’s humiliation by men, and describes her as “vive, impétueuse & vindicative” (I, 166). Meanwhile, in the *querelle* between La Mothe and Anne Dacier following their respective translations of the *Iliad*, although Iraitlh judges Dacier’s translation in many ways superior, he defames Dacier when she dares to quarrel. Iraitlh describes La Mothe’s prefatory discourse to his translation, in which he criticises Homer’s style, as

¹⁰ On these practices, see chapters three and five of Tidman, *Querelle des collèges*.

“écrit & raisonné supérieurement” (II, 309), while Dacier’s response, *Des causes de la corruption du goust* (1714), in which she defends Homer, is “[un] ouvrage dicté lui-même par le mauvais goût, par la prévention, le fiel & la haine. Que de grossièretés, que de termes injurieux à chaque page! . . . L’auteur, dans son livre, est une femme des halles en furie” (II, 311). Irailh’s *ad hominem* (*ad feminam*?) attack of Dacier combines two misogynistic stereotypes of the violent, quarrelsome women: first, that of the “harengère” or “poissarde”—the vulgar ‘fish wife’—which Pierre Ronzeaud has shown to date at least back to the Middle Ages; and second, the stereotype of the “furies”, goddesses of the underworld who wreak vengeance on men. While a woman who translates might pass as acceptable, a woman who quarrels does not.

Women were well aware of such reactions. In the *Mercure de France* of January 1764, under cover of pseudonymity, one ‘Madame D***’ pens a short letter entitled ‘Réflexions sur les hommes’, in which she expresses another fate that commonly awaited women who dared to think or express their ideas:

Qu’une Femme ose tenter de sortir du cercle étroit où son éducation semble la renfermer, on lui prodigue les éloges; on l’élève non-seulement au-dessus de son sexe, mais encore au-dessus des plus illustres Ecrivains. Que cette même Femme, enhardie par des éloges si flatteurs, use en conséquence du privilège accordé à tout être pensant; à peine daigne-t-on l’écouter. On est si convaincu de la fausseté de ses argumens, que la seule politesse semble engager à y répondre (43).

When women do offer critical opinions, Madame D*** says, they are simply dismissed by men, as Myriam Dufour-Maître has shown was also the case for “précieuses” in the seventeenth century. Who were the three women, then, who—remarkably—braved these risks, and participated in the *Querelle des collèges*?

The first was Adelaïde d'Espinassy, with her *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles* (1764). Little is known about Espinassy, who appears to have been unknown prior to the publication of the *Essai*—and even after. In 1766, the first volume of her only other known work appeared, the *Nouvel abrégé de l'histoire de France à l'usage des jeunes gens* (1766-1771). Commenting on the publication of this manual in the *Correspondance littéraire* of 15 January 1766, Grimm noted, “je ne sais ce que c'est que Mlle d'Espinassy” (479). In the ‘Épître dédicatoire’ of the *Nouvel abrégé*, addressed to queen Marie Leszczyńska, Espinassy writes that this new work is motivated by “le même but qui m'avoit fait prendre la plume [en 1764], je veux dire l'éducation & l'instruction de la jeunesse” (I, vi). Espinassy, then, seems to have been motivated to write by a particular interest in pedagogy, inspired by Rousseau's *Émile*. And yet, she was not a straightforward admirer of Rousseau's work.

Espinassy describes her *Essai* as a reaction against some of Rousseau's ideas regarding the education of Sophie, *Émile*'s future wife, and against the neglect of women's education in contemporary society in general (3-4). Women's education in eighteenth-century France had changed little since the early seventeenth century, and remained a heterogeneous affair. As Martine Sonnet has shown, while a small number of famous convents provided a slightly more expansive education, for those girls whose parents could afford to send them to a typical convent or *pension*, education “ne dépasse pas l'instruction religieuse, l'alphabétisation et les travaux d'aiguilles” (261). Espinassy objects to the fact that Rousseau's Sophie is given similarly limited instruction, and raised uniquely to become *Émile*'s wife. “[Rousseau] ne paroît pas juger les femmes capables de soutenir une certaine éducation; elles sont nées, selon

lui, que pour plier continuellement sous le joug d'un époux" (4). Countering Rousseau, she states, "[m]a façon de penser est bien différente" (5).

The *Essai* presents a plan for girls' education that echoes many of Fénelon's proposals in his *Éducation des filles* (1687). In Espinassy's programme, at around seven years old, girls should begin to study catechism, dance, music, domestic handicrafts, basic geometry, and arithmetic; between the ages of twelve and sixteen they should also take up history, geography, and drawing. Around the time of a girl's first communion, she should spend a year studying parts of the Old and New Testaments and "quelques livres moraux" (45), before proceeding to secular "lectures" at sixteen. Espinassy advises mothers to direct their daughters, initially, towards history, then mythology and classical poetry translated into French such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and—if girls must have "de la dissipation dans [leurs] lectures"—fairytales, moral tales such as *Don Quixote* or *Gil Blas*, or well-chosen modern tragedies or comedies (59-61).

Crucially, before eighteen years old a girl should not encounter novels, a genre considered "une prédilection féminine" in the early modern period (Grande 15).

Je trouve un grand danger dans la lecture des Romans, & je ne les voudrois permettre que quand l'esprit est assez formé pour distinguer le vrai, du faux. . . . Quelle idée voulez-vous que la jeune personne prenne, d'après cette lecture? la conséquence m'en paroît simple. L'amour est une passion, dira-t-elle; mais elle mene aux plus grandes choses (57).

Espinassy fears that novels will persuade girls that love is natural, excusable, and even leads to great things. A similar view was expressed by Fénelon, who argues that by reading novels, a girl "voudroit vivre comme ces princesses imaginaires" (15).

Girls were to become virtuous wives and could be led astray by novels, at least, so some in the seventeenth-century *Querelle des romans* argued.¹¹ Camille Esmein-Sarrazin has shown that this polemic was partly about women and fear of their corruption (68-70). In her discussion of whether novels are suitable for girls, Espinassy thus revives these claims of the *Querelle des romans*, and of male pedagogical thinkers on women's education, and incorporates them into her intervention in the *Querelle des collèges*.

In the *Année littéraire*'s largely positive review of the *Essai*, in 1764, Fréron praises Espinassy for her cautious, conservative programme, including her proscription of novels. "On ne sçauroit être trop circonspect en présence des enfans, sur-tout en présence d'une fille" (VII, 132-3). If a woman novelist, like Scudéry, could defend novels on the grounds of their moral utility, this was because she was addressing primarily women readers already complicit in the consumption of novels (Grande 308-9, 341-2). Her defence, in *Clélie* (1654-1660), offers women novel-readers an excuse for a *fait accompli*. Espinassy, on the other hand, could hardly recommend novels to young girls, certainly not when well-known earlier writers on women's education (Fénelon and Rousseau) had underlined their threat to 'virtue'. To appeal to the male participants and readers of the *Querelle*, Espinassy had to toe this line. Fréron's satisfied comments imply that she was right to do so.

¹¹ For instance, in the preface to his *Dialogue des Héros de roman* (composed 1664-1665, published 1688), Boileau contends that Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607-1627) 'fust fort vitieuse, ne preschant que l'Amour et la mollesse' (443). Furetière parodies this idea in his *Roman bourgeois* (1666) when his female reader, Javotte, is 'poisoned' by reading *L'Astrée*. For more on claims about the corrupting effect of novels, see Grande 339-41.

The second quarrel text by a woman is Joséphine de Montbart's *Sophie, ou l'éducation des filles* (1777), the only one of the three texts published under the author's name. Having been educated first by her mother, and later in a convent, the adolescent Joséphine refused an arranged marriage and escaped to Prussia with the man who would become her first husband, Louis de Montbart. It was from Prussia that Montbart published most of her works, inspired by Rousseau and by women writers including Sévigné, Lafayette, Graffigny, and du Châtelet (Marcellesi 1). Not limited to educational works, Montbart's first publication was the semi-autobiographical *Loisirs d'une jeune dame* (1776), and in 1784 another fictional text appeared, the *Lettres tahitiennes*, inspired by Bougainville's account of Tahiti in his *Voyage autour du monde* (1771) and by the vogue for epistolary fictions with 'exotic' heroines, as in Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747).¹² Between these publications, Montbart turned to the subject of women's education; *Sophie* was soon followed by a second treatise, *De l'éducation d'une princesse* (1781). Of the three women who intervened in the *Querelle*, Montbart was the most dogged in denouncing women's subjugation and the violence they face from men, a subject of almost all of her works. One man who escapes Montbart's critical gaze, however, is Rousseau.

Montbart begins *Sophie* by defending "ce Jean Jacques, tant lu, si peu compris & si persecuté", whom she notes has been attacked by *Querelleurs*. She proceeds to comment on the *Querelle des collèges*, as *Querelleurs* often did, but her remarks define her stance as unusual:

[Face à l'*Émile*], [d]es Instituteurs sévères, moins zélés mais plus orgueilleux, ont crié à l'impiété, au déisme; ils sont resté ensevelis sous leurs préjugés; les

¹² See the recent critical edition of this work by Laure Marcellesi.

institutions des collèges sont demeurées les mêmes; les maîtres sont toujours pédans; les écoliers sont mal instruits, mais enfin ils le sont. . . . [Q]uelque vicieuse que soit cette éducation, elle peut former de grands hommes (15-16).

Montbart acknowledges that the *Querelle* has produced little change in the *collèges*, but contends that a *collège* education is not actually that bad—it teaches boys something, which is more than can be said for girls’ education: “Qu’il s’en faut que l’éducation des filles soit susceptible des mêmes ressources!” (16). Montbart agonistically engages not just *in* the *Querelle des collèges* but *with* the *Querelle*, challenging its very premise, namely, that the *collèges* are in dire need of reform. She argues, rather, that it is girls’ education that most immediately requires attention.

Montbart develops the education of Sophie, which Rousseau neglected. At around eight years old Sophie begins Bible study, and shortly after commences lessons in dance, music, drawing and, from the age of twelve, arithmetic. Montbart is less wary of novels than Espinassy; Sophie is encouraged to read carefully-chosen novels which supposedly extol virtue, such as Rousseau’s *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Sophie and her governess discuss what they have read, and it is through these conversations that Sophie learns good taste and judgement. Her education ends with her entrance into worldly society and preparation for marriage.

Although she praises Rousseau throughout, Montbart’s programme for Sophie is very different even to that of *Émile*, in that reading is at its heart: “En lisant l’esprit s’ouvre, les idées naissent” (167). Nevertheless, Montbart is concerned that Sophie should not read, or learn, the ‘wrong’ things. Transposing a concern of the *Querelle des collèges* onto girls’ education, Montbart considers whether women should learn French or Latin, and concludes resolutely for the former: “[Les langues mortes] ne

sont pas faites pour nous [les femmes], & ne peuvent nous être d'aucune utilité. Assez de bons traducteurs nous ont transmis les plus beaux morceaux de l'antiquité" (184). She is also cautious of the sciences; she recommends Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* and Pluche's *Spectacle de la nature*, both works of vulgarisation, but contends that Buffon's encyclopedic *Histoire naturelle* is "trop savante & surtout beaucoup trop étendue" (179). She concludes that "rien n'est plus ridicule que ces femmes savantes qui se mêlent d'établir des systemes nouveaux . . . il ne nous appartient pas de juger [des sciences], puisque nous ne pouvons les concevoir" (177). Antipathy for the "femme savante" became commonplace in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, as Linda Timmermans has shown, kindled by satirical works such as Molière's *Les Femmes savantes* (1672) and Boileau's *Satire X* (1694) (123-32). Montbart at least appears to have taken on this misogynistic discourse (something I will return to later). Thus, although *Sophie* calls for better women's education, 'better' does not mean 'unlimited'.

The third women's intervention in the *Querelle* was the anonymous, seven-volume *Traité de l'éducation des femmes, et cours complet d'instruction* (1779-1789), by the comtesse de Miremont.¹³ Miremont was educated at an Augustinian convent school in Soissons, and spent what Henry de Buttet describes in his biography of Miremont as eight "heureuses années chez ces religieuses" (79). Not long after her marriage, in 1756, to Thomas-Exupère-François, Comte de Miremont, the couple purchased and renovated the Château de Coucy-les-Eppes, in the Aisne. Out of boredom in the winter, Mme de Miremont began frequenting salons in Paris, and in 1766 she wrote her first work, the autobiographical *roman à clef*, the *Mémoires de Madame la*

¹³ For more on this work, see Cherrad, 'De l'éducation des mères' 93-102.

marquise de Cremy, écrits par elle-même. Miremont became increasingly well-connected in fashionable and literary circles; Tissot was her doctor, she visited Voltaire, and attended *salons* frequented by d'Alembert and Beaumarchais. In 1779 she published the first volume of her most important work, the *Traité de l'éducation des femmes*, which (although it remained unfinished at seven volumes, in 1789), was well-received in France, Germany, and Austria (De Buttet 90).

Miremont situates herself in a lineage of women who have published texts about, or for use in, girls' education; she mentions "Mmes de Beaumont & de L***"—surely Madame de Lambert—" [qui] ont osé franchir le premier pas" (I, iv). Yet, this does not stop her from engaging with the male-dominated *Querelle des collèges*. She recognises "ce nombre d'ouvrages, qui ont paru depuis quelques années sur l'Education" and, like Montbart, she picks a bone not just with one or two men in the *Querelle*, but with all of them: "Envain s'efforcera-t-on de réformer l'éducation des hommes, si l'on ne travaille en même-tems, à créer un autre plan d'éducation pour les femmes" (I, xix). Disappointed by those women "que l'âge le plus mûr retrouve encore amusées par les hochets de l'enfance", Miremont maintains that their lack of education is to blame for their juvenile behaviour: "C'est parce qu'on a manqué de moyens que ces Femmes ont manqué de lumière" (I, vii). She blames this situation on patriarchal domination, writing, "les hommes nous aiment trop, ou trop peu, pour s'occuper de nous d'une maniere qui nous soit directement utile" (I, iii). Such arguments were common to defences of women in the *Querelle des femmes*, the long-running debate about women's status, nature, and capacities.¹⁴

¹⁴ Joan Kelly offers a good summary of this *Querelle*.

Like Espinassy and Montbart, Miremont presents a programme for the literary instruction of girls aged between seven and eighteen years old. However, rather than simply outlining what this programme would include, her *Traité* constitutes the very manual for this curriculum. After an initial treatise on education, the work becomes an anthology of extracts from authorities on subjects as varied as rhetoric, ancient and modern history, physiology, philosophy, and experimental physics. The most ‘modern’ of the three women in this study, Miremont’s authorities included *philosophes* such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Raynal—a fact which displeased the anti-*philosophe* *Année littéraire*, in its 1781 review (VIII, 248-51). Moreover, Miremont transposes male *Querelleurs*’ interest in reforming boys’ public institutions (the *collèges*) onto girls’ education. Since communal girls’ education usually occurred in convent settings, as Miremont herself had experienced, she inserts within her *Traité* a “Projet de réformation pour les Couvens voués à l’Education des jeunes Personnes” (I, 67-93). Quoting at length from Fénelon’s *Éducation des filles*, the “Projet” focuses on how to reform the education of the nuns who teach girls. Teacher training reform was hotly debated in the *Querelle des collèges*, with participants divided as to whether members of religious orders should be allowed to teach and, if not, how secular teachers should be recruited and formed: in a training institution, or via competitive examination.¹⁵ Miremont thus keeps one foot in the *Querelle des collèges* by tackling a subject disputed in this polemic, but applying it to women’s education.

Miremont requires would-be teacher-nuns to spend six months studying French grammar and spelling, followed by around a year of geography, religious history, and fables, and three years of modern and ancient history alongside “quelques lectures

¹⁵ The royal government showed support for the latter with the creation of the first Agrégation, in 1766.

agréables qui leur donne une idée juste des mœurs et des usages de ce siècle” (77). Convent teachers should also study some of Mme de Sévigné’s *Lettres*, and Mme de Lambert’s works (79). Miremont is concerned that nuns should understand worldly affairs and be able to teach girls the skills—notably, literary ones—to deal with them. Indeed, she produces a two-page list of texts that should be in all convent libraries, and in the ‘Belles-Lettres’ collection recommends Batteux’s *Cours de belles-lettres* (1747), a work praised by many in the *Querelle*, and Gaillard’s *Rhétorique française, à l’usage des demoiselles* (1746), the first literary manual aimed at a female readership, and the first to imply that women were capable of studying rhetoric.¹⁶

Espinassy, Montbart, and Miremont thus engage with key themes and actors of the *Querelle des collèges*. However, they are fundamentally more interested in rerouting the terms and reformatory energy of the *Querelle* towards girls’ education. This leads them to engage with other early modern quarrels relating to women’s education: the *Querelle du roman* and the *Querelle des femmes*. Indeed, in that these women call for better women’s education, their works might more properly be seen as interventions in the *Querelle des femmes* framed in the terms of the *Querelle des collèges*, and not vice versa. These texts certainly bear out Tadié’s observations that quarrels often overlap, and can be about something other than what they might seem...

That said, if these works are at root interventions in the *Querelle des femmes*, one might ask why their authors couched them in the terms of the *Querelle des collèges* at all. A major reason was that the latter quarrel was the one dominating bookshops and the press at the time. Not only did the *Querelle* catalyse Espinassy’s, Montbart’s, and

¹⁶ Viala considers the work in *Galanterie* (47).

Miremont's own educational thinking, but these women also appear to have recognised that they could capitalise on interest in the educational *querelle du jour* to redirect its male readers' attention away from boys' and towards girls' education. This is similar to the strategy Helena Taylor identifies in her analysis of Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier's response to Boileau's misogynistic *Dialogue des héros de roman* and *Satire X*. Taylor shows that L'Héritier couches what is ultimately a defence of women (and thus an act in the *Querelle des femmes*) in the more culturally prestigious terms of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, to give her a larger platform from which to reach readers (24). The strategic use of quarrels emerges, then, as a way for early modern writers with little social status, including women, to give their publications greater reach, particularly among the readership with the power to potentially change girls' educational practices: men.

Quarrelling Just Like a Woman

Besides using quarrels as tools to resist systemic subordination, these women writers also adopt discursive strategies for a similar end—strategies one rarely observes in men's quarrel texts. For a start, they often address their texts to women readers, and define women as their judges. Espinassy states that “lorsque je composai cet Essai d'éducation, je n'eus en vue qu'une Niece que j'aime . . . Je comptois donner des conseils à sa Mere, non à d'autres” (v). Miremont, meanwhile, situates herself in the lineage of Madame de Beaumont and Madame de Lambert, and remarks that “ces Dames ont écrit pour les Enfants, je voulois écrire pour les Meres” (iv), later adding, “Meres, qui doutez encore, ayez le courage de lire, & vous nous jugerez” (ix). In her literary syllabus, too, she recommends that girls read letters by Madame de

Maintenon, de Sévigné, and Deshoulières, and praises another recent text on education, Madame d'Épinay's *Les Conversations d'Émilie* (1774) (235-6, 112). Rather than argue with fellow women, Miremont and Espinassy engage with them irenically, as sources of inspiration and adjudicating authorities. This gender solidarity is absent in interactions between men in the *Querelle des collèges*; their texts, as La Chalotais and Crevier's showed, commonly use agonistic language and posit male judges, such as the public or monarch. By expressing solidarity with women writers, readers, and educators, Espinassy and Miremont seek to build support for their proposals among women, too.

Furthermore, Espinassy and Montbart attack discursive practices and subjects that they associate with men's quarrels. For instance, during a girl's religious study, Espinassy advises mothers, "éloignez [de votre fille] avec encore plus de soin les livres de parti: une femme n'étant point faite pour les disputes scholastiques" (46). Espinassy seems to be referring to disputes pertaining to matters of religion and philosophy, which might cause a girl to question her faith. Girls are not to read such disputes and, as Montbart underlines, they are certainly not to participate in them.

In an episode during Sophie's adolescence when her governess is teaching her to judge what she has read, Montbart criticises a certain type of quarreling:

Nous lisons peu, mais nous méditons nos lectures & . . . nous en causons beaucoup ensemble: Sophie dit son avis, le discute, le prouve quelquefois assez bien; elle apprend ainsi, sans s'en appercevoir les regles de la logique. Lorsque je lui dis que l'on en a fait un art qu'on traite fort sérieusement dans les colleges, elle rit, croyant que je me moque d'elle. Sophie sera bien plus étonnée lorsqu'elle saura que les hommes se déchirent mutuellement pour soutenir une opinion, ou pour en établir une nouvelle: que les philosophes de ce siecle, toujours en guerre les uns contre les autres, ne sont pas même d'accord avec

eux-mêmes; qu'ils possèdent l'art dangereux de prouver le pour & le contre (dd). Quand elle verra leurs livres pleins de contradictions, de sophismes, . . . elle gémera sur la folie des hommes & bénira son sexe, qui la condamne à une heureuse ignorance . . . (dd) Chacun sait la proposition impie de ce théologien qui, ayant fait un discours sublime sur l'existence de Dieu, offrit de la détruire par des preuves aussi fortes (159-60).

Here, quarreling is attacked and defined as male pursuit, by none other than a quarreling woman. Women, meanwhile, are oxymoronically described as being 'condemned to blissful ignorance'. These paradoxes require some scrutiny.

First, Montbart's use of the verb "condamne" ironically undercuts the idea that women's ignorance is truly blissful; on the contrary, it frames it as a form of punishment, even imprisonment. But how does this tally with Montbart's earlier condemnation of "les femmes savantes"? A comment, buried later in her work, proves instructive. Writing of men's power over women, Montbart states, "notre vie, celle de nos enfans, notre honneur, nos biens, notre sureté, tout est entre leurs mains; ils peuvent toujours nous rendre aussi malheureuses qu'il leur plait" (209). Her solution is thus: "Il n'est pour nous qu'une seule maniere de gouverner, c'est de savoir faire vouloir aux hommes ce que nous voulons" (209-10). Making men want what she wants involves ventriloquizing misogynistic discourse—paying lip service to men's prejudices against "les femmes savantes"—to reassure them that she is not promoting 'excessive' women's education, which might threaten men's power. In sum, Montbart seeks to make her proposals for women's education as attractive as possible to men. Hers is a strategy of soft power, and it leads to statements that sound like misogyny, but serve a different communicative function.¹⁷

¹⁷ Deborah Cameron recognises that "there is seldom if ever a one-to-one mapping between linguistic form and communicative function" (45), in her essay, with Fiona McAlinden and Kathy O'Leary, on women's use of tag questions. In addition, Grande

But what of Espinassy's and Montbart's descriptions of quarrelling as a male pursuit? This appears illogical, coming from two quarrelling women. One way to resolve this paradox is to conclude that these women are not quarrelling. Yet, their works have many of the features Tadié identifies as common to quarrels: they are affronted responses (to *Émile*, to the premise of the *Querelle des collèges*); they employ some agonistic language; they elect judges; they elicit press reactions; they overlap with other *querelles*. The presence of some non-normative practices of quarrelling (irenic engagement with women, for example) does not erase the many normative practices of quarrelling, usually associated with men; the former are additions to the latter.

There is an element of preterition in Espinassy's and Montbart's attacks on quarreling. By echoing the view, expressed by men like Iraitlh and Rousseau, that quarreling is at best unseemly for a woman, they forestall the potentially damaging accusation that they are quarreling. But, crucially, the mode of quarrelling these women condemn is not the one they practice. The quarrels they attack are "disputes scholastiques", waged by "philosophes", using the art of logic taught in the *collèges*. These are quarrels in which "*les hommes se déchirent mutuellement*" (my emphasis), often pertaining to religious matters. Indeed, Montbart's enigmatic footnote condemning "[un] théologien" hints at an anecdote in which the cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron (1556-1618) offered to Henri III first to prove, and then to disprove, the existence of God.¹⁸ This type of dispute was often called a "controverse", which,

shows that seventeenth-century women novelists similarly advanced apparently misogynistic discourse to serve a contrary communicative end (129-32).

¹⁸ The anecdote is recorded by Pierre de l'Estoile, dated 25 November 1583, and transmitted in eighteenth-century publications of his journals. It is also reported in

as the 1762 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* notes, “se dit plus ordinairement de la dispute qui se fait sur des points de Foi” (391).

The denunciation of this ‘extreme’ brand of quarrel parallels Montbart’s criticism of the especially learned “femme savante”. Although Montbart’s anti-quarrel claims appear paradoxical, their specificity ultimately leaves room for her and other women to participate in public *querelles littéraires*, like the *Querelle des collègues*, that were not about religion, or bound by scholastic rules. Viewed in the context of misogynistic eighteenth-century French society, women writers’ calls for *better girls’* education, for *some* scope to quarrel, are a pragmatic solution to reclaim a degree of power.

While women today might denounce misogyny with the hashtags #balancetonporc, #metoo, or by reclaiming Boris Johnson’s slur and declaring themselves “girly swots”, the women writing in the *Querelle des collègues* had far less latitude. Their strategies for collective resistance were, by necessity, different. By rehearsing arguments against the “femme savante”, by ventriloquising the misogynistic stereotype that women must not argue, Montbart appeases the male readership of the *Querelle* and clears a space for women to learn, and to quarrel, at least a little more than usual. For want of a hashtag with which to identify themselves and call women to arms, Espinassy and Miremont adopt long-hand discursive tags that serve similar ends, praising women writers and electing women as their judges. Finally, without a ready platform from which to make their case for girls’ educational reform, these women paste their demands onto the pages of the *Querelle des collègues*, overwriting it with other quarrels, other concerns. These women did not have a room of their own,

Jean-Baptiste Ladvocat’s *Dictionnaire historique portatif*, first published in 1752 and republished multiple times over the century.

and were not in a position to ask for one. But, collectively, they helped to clear a bit of desk space that those coming after them might use, whether to quarrel or to learn.

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